English Literary Studies Today:
From Theory to Activism

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Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

WILLIAM BLAKE

Introduction

Miguel Ramalhete & Remedios Perni

1

The most concise articulation of theory and activism remains Karl Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it". Marx's challenge still echoes in universities around the world, urging, if not simply a move beyond the library, at least a new way of understanding the work done there. It can, however, generate anxiety and resentment: after all, what is wrong with interpreting the world? And there seem to be also many ways of getting side-tracked in the apparently difficult passage from theory to activism.

At its utilitarian worst, Marx's connection between ways of describing the world and ways of changing it has found an echo in research funding calls, in which research in literary studies must somehow move so far away from itself as to need to think of its contribution to areas such as green transport or leadership in new industrial technologies when trying to obtain funding aimed at research on De Quincey's "The English Mail-Coach" or Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*.

At its activist worst, Marx's dictum has been occasionally misread as a dismissal of theory – airy and abstract – in the name of practice, of doing and acting out, in a historical suspicion of bourgeois intellectuals in left-wing circles.

At its intellectualist worst, Marx's thesis has led to a scholasticism of revolutionary ideas, an elaboration of oversubtle reasons to account for why the outside world does not conform to the enlightened bubbles of higher education.

2

In the work done by members of the Frankfurt School, the expression "critical theory" acknowledged that a positivistic description of the world serves an ideological function: "The new ideology (…) exploits the cult of fact by describing bad existence with utmost

exactitude in order to elevate it into the realm of facts. Through such elevation existence itself becomes a surrogate of meaning and justice" (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002: 119). The neutral duplication of the world strengthens it, making it seem too vivid for change to be imaginable. Historically, the Frankfurt School suffered from a perhaps unexpected contradiction: by tracing in equally vivid manner the ways in which it had become impossible to live rightly a wrong life (cf. Adorno 2005, 39), it described its own practical paralysis, in residence at what Georg Lukács called the "Grand Hotel Abyss" (1971, 22).

This is also because, as Guy Debord writes in *The Society of the Spectacle*,

> It is obvious that ideas alone cannot lead beyond the existing spectacle; at most, they can only lead beyond existing ideas about the spectacle. To actually destroy the society of the spectacle, people must set a practical force into motion. A critical theory of the spectacle cannot be true unless it unites with the practical current of negation in society. (Debord 2014: 111)

In Debord's *détournement* of Marx and Engels, he adapts another version of the idea behind Marx's thesis, in which Marx and Engels state the materialist obvious, that "Ideas *cannot carry out anything* at all" (Marx & Engels 1975, 119). Abstract critiques, however clever, may end up as little more than classroom exercises in courses of cultural studies. On the other end of this, and assuming that the transition between theory and activism is a settled matter, is the apparently simpler problem of how to get *it* done. The practicalities of juggling academic and activist work – sometimes the same thing, often not – are dealt with by Michael Flood, Brian Martin & Tanja Dreher (2013) in pragmatic manner: what can and should be done towards achieving a goal. And yet the union of critical theory with a "practical current of negation in society" has been fraught. Although activism has increasingly become linked to theoretical work produced in institutions of higher education, to the satisfaction of intellectuals who find assurance that their work has social impact, this link may need some fine-tuning as well as some perhaps-not-so-fine-tuning soon, if it is not to lapse into the ingrained habits of each side.

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In the contemporary moment, at what seems perhaps the moment of greatest symbiosis between theory and activism, by which activism is more informed than ever by theory, whereas activist work is increasingly a part of what academics do and think, the danger may come from precisely this greater connection,

taking different forms at both ends, as well as at their more impassioned junctures. The following points mean to address a small series of present dangers:

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In the study of literature, an attention to progressive contents may lead to an examination of a text as the expression of a cultural theme. By privileging the expression of a specific content – a testimony of oppression or the celebration of an identity – such scholarly work sometimes overlooks the formal indigence of many of these primary texts. To come back to Adorno, in the culture industry, a progressive content does not redeem a formulaic expression; instead, in is in the domain of form that some of the greatest subversion still resides. An activist attention to literature and literary theory should, therefore, be aware that form is too important to be left to formalists.

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An attention to form and rhetoric might instil in theoretically informed activists (whether they are academics or not) a greater pragmatism and awareness of the effects of using a theoretical discourse in a practical situation. It is often the case that the byzantine language of academic theory can end up as a stilted jargon enforced by earnest activists, to the alienation of sympathizers. A greater consciousness of how to speak rhetorically – how to adapt discursive forms to different fora – might perhaps lead to an awareness of when it may be more effective *not* to respond to a Facebook comment or to an intervention at an assembly with a lengthy paraphrase of Gayatri Spivak, Pierre Bourdieu or Judith Butler.

*

> Miss Prism. Do not speak slightingly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.
> Cecily. Did you really, Miss Prism? How wonderfully clever you are! I hope it did not end happily? I don't like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.
> Miss Prism. The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.
> Cecily. I suppose so. But it seems very unfair. (Wilde 2008, 501).

The return of earnestness brings us, "by a commodius vicus of recirculation", to the Victorian context of much of Marx's theoretical and activist work. In a contemporary moment in which some activism seems to be more a matter of individual

morality than of universal politics, practices like shaming and ostracizing others, while exhibiting the purity of one's beliefs, words, and behaviours, are becoming more prominent. As a means of enforcing a group mentality and policing its borders, such practices are as counterproductive as they were in nineteenth-century Britain, although they prove how attractive it still is to cast others as bad people, when it comes to reassuring oneself that one is good. At this point, it is perhaps not so much Marx but Oscar Wilde who may be of help in understanding a certain culture of activism, from the mouth of the "villain" of *An Ideal Husband*:

> MRS. CHEVELEY. (…) Remember to what a point your Puritanism in England has brought you. In old days nobody pretended to be a bit better than his neighbours. In fact, to be a bit better than one's neighbour was considered excessively vulgar and middle-class. Nowadays, with our modern mania for morality, everyone has to pose as a paragon of purity, incorruptibility, and all the other seven deadly virtues – and what is the result? You all go over like ninepins – one after the other. Not a year passes in England without somebody disappearing. (Wilde 2008, 408)

Instead of trying to react to impossible – and constantly changing– ideals, with "virtue-signalling" as an inevitable shortcut, one of the challenges for activists might be to learn, like the eponymous character of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, that people cannot "be divided into the good and the bad as though they were two separate races or creations" (Wilde 2008, 377).

To understand this is, on the one hand, to accept the platitude that the world is complex and that there is more to people than their opinions on topics trending on Twitter. On the other hand, this should mean thinking about the politics – not the morality – of activism now, which is to ask: is the goal to affirm one's individual purity or to achieve collective gains? If it is to affirm one's purity and to police that of others, this will mean excluding many potential friends, ending in the usual fragmentation well known in the left and in university departments; but if the politics are firmly collective, demanding a broad front, this means overcoming "a culture of snitching, shaming and humiliation" (Dollimore 2018, 711), which tends to produce more enemies than allies. Because much of this culture thrives in universities, especially in Anglophone ones, they are a privileged place in which to find better ways to engage with others. The interplay of theory and activism might thus revolve around one of the most unresolved issues in both fields, that of using rhetoric to avoid divisiveness: what if, instead of bullying others into resentfully checking their privilege, one could simply try to persuade them to join the fight for the collective good?

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This special issue can be seen as an attempt to persuade our readers to think and fight for the collective good. With this purpose on mind, it presents a selection of seven articles that try to answer a variety of intertwined questions: what is the role of academia in the long-term project of changing the world? What are the relations between – and how can one relate – theory and practice, and the literature classroom and the world? More specifically, how have literature and other art forms contributed to revealing ideas and new ways of critiquing that might eventually lead to or inspire collective movements and fights? And how does the study of aesthetics, the scholarly analysis of literature, in particular, add to the revolutionary movements of our era? This issue offers a polyhedral (and incomplete) perspective – not a final answer – in the hope that more and more colleagues will join us and continue the discussion in the near future.

The volume begins with Christian Smith's "*The point is to change it*: The Imperative for Activist Literary Studies," a reflection on how the practice of literary criticism can lead to an imperative for activism. Smith explores Karl Marx's use of intertextuality in his critique of the harmful inversions caused by capitalism. As discussed by Smith, Marx's quotations from and allusions to literature – to Homer, Cervantes and Shakespeare, to name but a few authors – provides his writings with a new impulse. Likewise, and following Marx's logics, literary criticism may become a means to reveal the urgent need for change though action. The second article contributes a connected idea: an empowering narrative can be used to endorse the fight of a community. This is one of the main points of Martín Fernández Fernández's "Tracing Emmet Till's Legacy from Black Lives Matter back to the Civil Rights Movement", a paper that explores the infamous murder of Emmet Till – and others – as one of the core elements which binds together the Civil Rights Movement and Black Lives Matter in the US. Of course, a volume on the need for activism cannot indulge in believing that the cause of all evils is outside the academic institution; and this is why the third article, a contribution of Nurudeen Adeshina Lawal, "Chaos in the Ivory Tower: Postcolonial Representations of the Nigerian Academic Elite in Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road* and Ojo Rasaki Bakare's *Once Upon a Tower*" adds an interesting surface to the polyhedron: the idea that certain members of the academic elite promote disorder in the polity and corruption in universities. Lawal points to these issues in Nigeria, showing the ways in which the playwrights Irobi and Bakare invite the academic elite to engage in critical self-interrogation, as well as genuine scholarly and community-based activities. The fourth article, María Consuelo Fores's "Shakespeare for Revolution: from Canon to Activism", returns to the idea – already described by Christian

Smith – that a canonical author such as Shakespeare, widely studied in universities all around the world, can provide us with a political impulse towards cultural activism. Indeed, the fifth article, Rosa García-Periago's "Mickey B/ Macbeth: Bringing Shakespeare to Prisons and Academia via Film Adaptation" stands as testimony of this. García-Periago explains how the full-length film adaptation of *Macbeth*, filmed and created by the innates of a high-security prison in Northern Ireland, Her Majesty's Prison Maghaberry, has brought into focus the potentialities of community engagement and the interlinks between academia and what happens beyond the university walls. The author herself has both translated *Mickey B* into Spanish and conceived a project to work with socially excluded groups. The sixth article, Yolanda Caballero Aceituno and Aroa Orrequia Barea's "English Studies and Literary Education in the Era of Media Manipulation," discusses whether the current academic context is hospitable to a literary education that favours critical awareness that might lead to activism. Caballero and Orrequia have worked actively with a group of students of the University of Jaén (Spain) and concluded that, to encourage critical thinking, it is necessary to foster positive emotions and empathy in our literary lessons. This is, precisely, the aim of Juan José Bermúdez de Castro's film workshop, which he organizes every academic year at the University of the Balearic Islands: to encourage students – and other spectators – to watch a selection of films and engage in discussion with activists and professors. In the last article, "*Aules Sense Armaris: Cinema LGBTIQ+ I*" ["Classrooms Without Closets: LGTBIQ+ Cinema"], Bermúdez de Castro provides his perspective, as a Literature and Cultural Studies professor, on how this type of experience may open not only the doors of many closets but also the doors of academia itself.

In a nutshell, the present volume intends to show the move from theory to activism: from Marx's reflections on Shakespeare to the ways certain narratives have an impact on social movements such as BLM, to the critique of institutions such as universities through the discussion of politically-engaged plays and fictions, to the impulse that arises among many colleagues in academia working to raise awareness in places as inhospitable as prisons, or as fundamental as their own classrooms, to those who organise forums with activists or try to become active in the fight for freedom and equality.

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"The point is to change it": The Imperative for Activist Literary Studies

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Abstract

The task undertaken in this paper is to discover a means by which the practice of literary criticism can derive an imperative for activism that confronts and changes the social conditions it critiques. The case of Karl Marx's use of world literature in his critique of capitalism and the state, set within the history of the development of continental philosophy, is explored through a close-reading of its interterxtuality. Particular attention is paid to Marx's use of quotations from and allusions to world literature, including Homer, Sophocles, Virgil, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe and Heine, to register the harmful inversions caused by an economy based on money and commodities. If literature registers the contradictions of its time in its form and content, then the urge to resolve those contradictions sits restless in literature. When Marx inserts literature into his theoretical texts, he transfers into his text the impulse of the contradiction to resolve itself. Similarly, literary criticism is well-placed to unfold clear, obvious and necessary logic which leads to activism.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Marxism, Activism, Literary Criticism, Inversions

<p style="text-align:center">1</p>

Literature constructs its scenes from the material and social struggles of historical actors. It registers the contradictions of its time in its form and content. The author lifts features of the struggle from history and abstracts them in the art. According to Adorno's aesthetic theory, well-formed art, constructed from and brimming with the contradictions of its time, confronts the readers' subjectivity and has the potential to awaken them from sleepy reified consciousness.

The material and historical struggles (class, race, gender, and others) and their contradictions sit restless in the fiction (poetic, dramatic, narrative) and clamour for resolution. This demand for resolution serves as the wellspring of an urge (*Drang*) that surges up and threatens to break through (*dringen*) during the encounter with literature (reading, watching a play, etc.) This *Drang* is part of what makes literature evocative and powerful; it calls forth emotions, thoughts and judgment from the reader. However, the struggles and contradictions registered in literature do not necessarily become salient at this level of encounter. That exegesis requires literary criticism.

Literary criticism close-reads, analyses and interprets the text. *Ana-lysis* is the process of unfolding, pulling apart and laying-out-flat significant elements of literary texts.[1] These elements include the struggles and contradictions registered in the text. It is only at this point, at the level of criticism, that these struggles and contradictions are named. The characters experience desire, frustration, fear, self-doubt, double-binds, traumatic scenes, existential dread, etc. The context for these issues is the contradictions that arise from class exploitation, racism, misogyny, Queer bashing, ecocide, etc. Literary criticism renders these contradictions explicit.[2] The author *depicts* the struggle; the critic *interprets* it. Interpretation is a further abstraction. Real lives are constructed as fictional

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1   The word *analysis* is a borrowing from Latin, where it denotes to resolve something into its elements. Its etymological root in Greek, *ἀνάλυσις,* denotes the action of loosing, undoing or releasing (O.E.D.)

2   The focus in this paper will be on literary criticism which takes up social questions. However, even in criticism that is not necessarily organised around a social question, contradictions can still be uncovered and interpreted. For example, textual studies can critique patriarchal power in literary canonisation, and translation studies can uncover female translators whose identity and contributions have been hidden and repressed behind translation project branding. The present author's work on Dorothea Tieck and Caroline Schlegel repressed in the history of the *Schlegel-Tieck* German translation of Shakespeare's plays is an example of the latter case. See Smith, Christian. Translations and Influence: Dorothea Tieck's Translations of Shakespeare. *Borrowers and Lenders, XI,* 2, Spring 2018 https://www.borrowers.uga.edu/783932/show

scenes and interpreted as themes in criticism. The struggle moves from occurring on the street to appearing on the page to being discussed in the lecture hall. Each level of abstraction makes the struggle more salient, more available for critique, and more fit for provoking activism.

Literary criticism is driven by theory, and most theory is built from the contradictions and struggles that are registered in the literature. Marxist (class), feminist, Queer, race, postcolonial, and other literary theories owe their existence to the very problems they theorise. These theories close-read literature, looking for the struggles they are named after and use the literary depictions of these struggles to read their present moment. In literary theory, the material struggle reaches its highest level of abstraction and is presented to its readers/ scholars/ students to be read, discussed, examined and written about further. Literary scholars use their readings of poems, plays, stories and novels—of any time period—to make statements about material and social history.

And yet, can literary criticism make changes in history? Can it be a force in changing the conditions it studies? Can literary criticism be activist?

Certainly, there are literary critics who are also political activists. One might research and teach in a university literature department and also participate in workplace strikes, walk a picket line, go to a demonstration, or even fight in a revolution. These critics' activism stands *parallel* to their scholarship. They may have been influenced by their scholarship to decide to join a movement. They may be activist as employees of an educational institution; in this case their activism follows from their class position. They may be activists in a particular movement as members of a specific oppressed group, for example female professors who work in the struggle for women's rights, or professors of colour who work in the struggle for civil rights.

The task undertaken in this paper is to find a logic for activism that is not merely parallel to one's scholarship, but, instead, is *a result* of one's scholarship. This would be activism that *unfolds logically from one's literary theory*. It would be immanent, systematic and necessary. The unfolding would call for the resolution of existing contradictions which have been analysed by the theory; this resolution would necessitate the overthrow of existing economic, political and social structures that create the contradictions.[3]

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3   The goal of this paper is not to discuss *where* literary criticism will work for activist change, but *how* it will unfold that imperative in its logic. However, it may be necessary for now to list the various ways in which literary criticism circulates through society. Literary scholars speak to other scholars at conferences and through publications. At its best, the academy is a site for collective development and critique of ideas by people well-studied in their particular field. The ideas in this essay, for example, were read and critiqued by two readers and an editor before appearing here. And now they are being read and considered by

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To find a method for an activist literary theory, one can turn to the writings of Karl Marx, a revolutionary critic of the existing systems of his time—capitalism and the nation-state—who used world literature extensively in his activist writings. Marx was a philosopher and a journalist; he was not a literary critic. However, a study of his use of literature may offer a model for criticism to derive activism.

Marx's thought can be understood within the development of continental philosophy as an advanced stage in the evolution of philosophy's critical enterprise which has progressively shed abstraction and immanetised itself in the world.[4] An activist continental philosophy was not possible until Marx's dialectical materialism. However, a reading of the development of German philosophy, from Kant to Hegel to Marx, reveals a latent urge towards social activism even in the idealist philosophers.

The age of critique is inaugurated by Kant's project to establish the limits of knowledge through a critical stance with regards to the form of reason itself. To stake out this critical stance, Kant positions reason outside of the material world; his transcendental idealism establishes an insurmountable wall between thought and being. Kant forecloses the possibility of knowing things-in-themselves; instead experience is synthesised from a combination of *a priori* concepts and aesthetic data. When he applies his critical stance to morality in his second critique, he insists that one *cannot* know good itself. Instead one can only reflect on the concept of law and extract the formal features of what a law

the readers of this journal. Though this group is most likely small, it is significant in the development of the argument and its circulation. Most literary critics also teach students at multiple levels of higher education. Their texts are assigned to students by other scholars. Many people first become social activists at university as a result of what they have been learning. As long as attendance at university remains high and students choose to study literature, the number of people reached by the work of literary critics is significant. This makes the fight to save the humanities crucial for social change. Some scholars are public intellectuals and their work makes contact with the general public—including rulers, politicians, policy-makers, and social activists—through books, newspapers, blogs, podcasts, social media, video platforms, and public lectures. Through social activist public education, literary criticism can be taken up as an intellectual practice by people who are employed in work other than scholarship. Finally, some ideas from literary criticism are also carried in the oral discourse of the general public, including in film and television adaptations of literary texts, and in the creative appropriations of fandom. On fandom see, for example, the work of Valerie Fazel and Louise Geddes, eds., including, *The Shakespeare User: Critical and Creative Appropriations in a Networked Culture*, London; Palgrave, 2017.

4   This section of the paper has benefitted from discussion with Stephen Barrell (Warwick Philosophy). Some of the notions discussed here were presented to the present author in personal communication with Barrell in May, 2020.

grounded on the good would look like. These features are posited as a synthetic *a priori* practical principle, which is universal and non-contradictory. This is the categorical imperative:

> Handle so, daß du die Menschheit, sowohl in deiner Person, als in der Person eines jeden andern, jederzeit *zugleich* als Zweck, niemals bloß als Mittel brauchest (Kant, 1977, Kindle location 814)

> Act so that you use humanity, in your person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means (Kant, 2012).

The imperative must be treated as a fundamental law of practical reason:

> Handle so, daß die Maxime deines Willens jederzeit zugleich als Prinzip einer allgemeinen Gesetzgebung gelten könne (Kant, 2003, 41).

> Act so that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle in a giving of universal law (Kant, 1997, 28).

Finally, Kant admits that this position is actually not completely attainable, and that one can only strive (*streben*) to approach it (1997, 71).

The critical spirit suffused the social, political, theological and scientific landscapes of Kant's day, and, consequently, as a historical movement, contained an activist urge in it. Indeed, it contains the epistemological roots of the Enlightenment which is the context for significant historical changes. However, due to the limitations imposed by Kant's method, the philosopher worked outside of the material stage of history. G. W. F. Hegel critiqued Kant's transcendentalism and placed reason back onto the historical stage. In Hegel's philosophy, critique is *immanent* in worldly knowledge; it has no existence beyond this manifestation. However, for Hegel, critique is the activity *of reason itself*, overcoming its limitations and contradictions. This overcoming is a process of unfolding; each step of the unfolding is to be found immanent in the former step. There is no need to force movement in Hegel's method. Instead, the philosopher must stand back and allow (*zu lassen*) the unfolding of the logic (Hegel 1969, 72). In this manner, the logic will be generated (*hervorbringen*). The progressive determination of each of these steps in the logic is necessitated by its own nature, by the dialectical movement of its *becoming*. For Hegel, *freedom* reveals itself as the *truth* of this necessity.

Hegel's immanent critique insists on two requirements. First, it prohibits all presuppositions in order to begin the unfolding from the beginning—*reines*

Sein (pure being). Even at the beginning, *pure being* has already passed over into *pure nothing*, and the dialectic moves along unfolding the next step from the contradictions immanent in the previous step. This state of immanent *becoming* continues in Hegel's philosophy until he reaches, at the end of the *Logic,* the abstract notion of the Absolute Idea (*die absolute Idee*). The absolute nature of the Idea becomes apparent when the philosopher achieves the unalienated grasp of the *being* to which she belongs, and by adhering to the second requirement, the mutual recognition of the *self* and the *other*.

Starting in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a text from which one is tempted to source Hegelian ethics, Hegel prepares readers to accept that the *self* is determined by the presence of the *other* in it.[5] However, Hegel is not preparing the readers for an ethical life grounded in acceptance of, and empathy for, the *other*. Instead he is laying down the groundwork for his logic. Recognising the *other* in the *self* prepares one to allow the first movement of the logic: *nothing* sublates (*aufheben*) *being*. As soon as this sublation is allowed, the logic begins unfolding, passing through *determinate being* in the relationship between *something* and *other*, *finitude* and *infinity*, and *being-for-self,* from which the *One* is derived and the conditions for *quantity* are set up. This long and difficult section on quantity tracks *being* as it passes through notions of *magnitude* and will form a basis for Hegel's later work in the philosophy of nature. From here, the *quantum* comes into unity with its qualitative significance as *measure,* in which the notion of the next section, *essence*, is already immanent. Hegel then derives the *Notion (Der Begriff)*, of which *being* and *essence* are its moments of *becoming*. In the *Logic*, abstract *being* passes over into determinate being, but then withdraws into essence. Essence reveals itself to be determined as ground, thereby enters existence and realises itself as substance, but then withdraws into Notion. Towards the end of the *Logic*, notion determines itself into objectivity, which then withdraws into the *Idea*.

Activism cannot arise from Hegel's philosophy, because this unfolding of the logic is achieved by standing back and allowing *being* to realise itself. However, Hegel *does* have a philosophy of society; he writes this in his lectures on the *Philosophy of Right*. In order to be expressions of freedom, the notions and structures derived in the *Right* must become logically *explicit* from what is immanently *implicit* in *Geist*. According to Hegel, *Geist*'s freedom can only be expressed when externalised as *private property, the family,* and *the state*. The state is rational in and for itself inasmuch as it is the actuality of the substantial will which it possesses in the particular self-consciousness that has been raised to its

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5   The purpose of this paragraph is to lay out the steps Hegel takes in his philosophy, but not to explain them. The reader need not fully understand each term, but rather the logic of the *progression* of the steps, to understand the point being made in this section on Hegel.

universality. It is the unity of the individual and the universal. The state is the final concept derived in the *Philosophy of Right*; it is the goal of the lectures. Here one recalls the infamous sally with which Hegel opens the *Philosophy of Right*: "Was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich;/ und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig" (1970, 24). (What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational).[6] And what is actual for Hegel in human society is private property, the family and the (existing Prussian) state.[7]

In 1837 a 19-year-old student called Karl Marx arrived at the University of Berlin, where Hegel taught philosophy until his death in 1831. Over the next five years, under the guidance of Hegel's successor, Eduard Gans, and in study groups with Left Hegelians, Marx studied philosophy and critiqued Hegel's conclusions. In 1842, Marx moved to Köln to begin his writing career as a journalist, working first at a Liberal daily newspaper, the *Rheinische Zeitung*. The newspaper offices were in a building on Schildergasse on one side of the Neumarkt, where the Prussian military paraded as the occupying force. Marx stayed at the Hotel Laacher Hof, on the other side of the Platz. In the midst of the occupying forces, Marx took up the critique of the Prussian occupation of Rhineland in his articles.[8]

Through his critique of Prussian imperialism and exploitation of Rhineland, in the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx meticulously picked apart Hegel's conclusion that the state could properly represent the people. Part of this critique included his first look at the economic question, which he began in his article on the Prussian Laws on the Theft of Wood. In 1843, after the Prussians censored and shut down Marx's newspaper, Marx embarked on a direct critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* for a journal he founded in Paris, the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*.

Marx shows that Hegel goes astray and the dialectic grinds to a halt in the beginning of the *Philosophy of Right*, where Hegel posits private property—the

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6 All translation from German are by the present author, unless otherwise cited.
7 Stephen Houlgate does find an active political outcome from Hegel's philosophy in his notion of freedom. He writes that, "ethical life (Sittlichkeit), for Hegel, is thus the sphere of human subjectivity conceived as the realm of objective freedom and right" (2005, 195), and that, "freedom is not just to be found in unrestricted individual choice or in unregulated pursuit of self-satisfaction, but in living in accordance with law within a just political constitution" (182). Significantly for the present study, Houlgate signals the role of literature (as art) in Hegel's system: "If absolute freedom is to be attained, therefore, it will not be through economic or political activity, but through an understanding of absolute character or truth of existence in *art*, religion and philosophy" (210) (emphasis by author).
8 This discussion of the locations of Marx's work and residence in Köln comes from the present author's research and from discussion with Jürgen Herres (Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften).

private ownership of exchange value—as the expression of the will of *Geist*. Using Hegel's own logic, it is clear that exchange-value is *being-for-self* (*Fürsichsein*) which finds its determination in the *other*—the labourer—and then attempts to annihilate him as it turns inward and fortresses itself in self-relating *quantity*.[9] Hegel's theory of private property, civil society and state is laden with contradictions that clamour for resolution. Hegel was prevented from correctly continuing his dialectical method into his theory of society by the historical conditions of his own society and the formation of his subjectivity and scholarship. The next step would require someone formed in different historical conditions, and someone who could continue the unfolding of continental philosophy no longer restrained by the transcendentalism of Kant or the idealism of Hegel.

3

Before Marx became a scholar, he wanted to be a poet. He read Shakespeare, Goethe, Heine and other poets from an early age. From adolescence through to his university years, he wrote many poems, including some to his father and some to his fiancée. His first published work was poetry. His transformation from a budding poet into a philosophy student was announced to his father in a letter dated November 10-11, 1837; the significant pivot in the letter, where Marx describes the moment and location where his transformation occurred, is set in the lines of a poem by Heinrich Heine.

Marx had been studying day and night in Berlin and, consequently, his health broke down from exhaustion. A doctor sent him to rest in a fishing village on the Stralau peninsula on the river Spree. Instead of resting, Marx intensified his study of Hegel's *Logic*, surrendering his consciousness to come under the sway of the dialectic. He describes his metamorphosis like this:

> …diese Arbeit…dieß mein liebstes Kind, beim Mondschein gehegt, trägt mich wie eine falsche Sirene dem Feind in den Arm…Vor Aerger konnte ich einige Tage gar nichts denken, lief wie toll im Garten an der Sprea [sic] schmutzigem Wasser, "dass Seelen wäscht und Thee verdünnt" umher, machte sogar eine Jagdparthie mit meinem Wirthe mit, rannte nach Berlin und wollte jeden Eckensteher unarmen. (*MEGA III.1*, 16)

> …this work…this my favourite child, nurtured by moonlight, bore me like a false siren into the arms of the enemy…from vexation I could not think for a couple of

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9   See the present author's article on the contradictions of exchange value in *Critique 45, 1-2*, 2017.

days, I ran around as if I was crazy in the garden by the dirty water of the Spree, which "washes souls and dilutes tea", even participated in a hunting excursion with my host, and raced to Berlin and wanted to hug every street loafer.

The moment the dialectic seized control of Marx's mind, it temporarily disrupted his capacity to think. His body took over, running circles in the guest house garden, which stood directly on the banks of the Spree. To register his condition, Marx reaches for a quotation from Heinrich Heine's poem "Frieden." ("Peace") (Heine 2007, 269) In this satirical poem, Heine mocks upwardly-mobile piety in Berlin. The line comes from a stanza that is so satirical Heine himself censored it. (Gelber 1992, 38, Prawer 1978, 20).

> In der frommen Stadt
> Wo der Sand und der Glauben blüht,
> Und der heiligen Sprea [sic] gedulgiges Wasser
> Die Seelen wascht und der Tee verdünnt.

> In the pious city
> Where sand and faith blossoms,
> And the holy Spree's patient water
> Washes souls and dilutes tea.

Two features of this quotation identify the state of Marx's consciousness at this moment of his metamorphosis. First, the stanza is bitterly satirical. Heine slams contrasting images against each other: the allegory of faith blossoming is undercut by the image of sand, which is infertile ground. The patient and holy water of the river that runs through the capital of Prussia, which Marx besmirches as *schmutzig* (dirty), is used for washing souls but also for cheating customers by diluting and thereby producing more of the commodity tea to sell. The poem describes the appearance of Christ in Berlin. Heine uses exaggerated imagery of religious peace—billowing white clouds, flowing white robes, a still lake—set in overwrought alliteration: "Im wallend weißen Gewande/ Wandelt er…. (269). Then he writes:

> O Friedenswunder! Wie still die Stadt!
> Es ruhte das dumpfe Geräusch
> Der schwatzenden, schwülen Gewerbe,
> Und durch die reinen, hallenden Straßen
> Wandelten Menschen, weißgekleidete,
> Palmzweigtragende

O wonder of peace! How quiet is the city!
It silences the dull noise
Of the babbling sultry trade,
And along the pure reverberating streets
Wander people, clad in white clothing
Carrying palm leaves.

The piety of the people, dressed in white and carrying palm leaves, silences the noise of trade. The streets of Berlin are pure and reverberating. The trade, on the other hand, is babbling and sultry. With this juxtaposition, Heine registers the function of religion to cover up the sluttish intercourse of nascent capitalism in the Prussian *Hauptstadt*. This contradiction is tightened in the deleted stanza that Marx quoted, where the holy water itself both washes souls and dilutes tea. In Heine's poem, Prussian capitalism, which had already been ruthlessly exploiting Heine's and Marx's homeland, is hushed and veiled by Prussian piety.

When Marx writes this letter to his father in November 1837, he has not yet written *any* economic critique. The quotation signals to his father—a man who, as a Jew and a Liberal, suffered greatly during the Prussian occupation—that as Karl falls into the arms of the enemy—Hegelian philosophy—he is situating himself in the opposition. Indeed, Marx became an active member of the Left Hegelian tendency. The sign of his opposition is carried in his use of Heine's verse. The verse contains the contradiction, which when allowed to unfold, unmasks Prussian capitalism. The imperative of profit, registered in the image of water used to dilute tea, hushed by a hypocritical religion, registered by the image of the holy water, is dredged up to the surface. This is one role of Heine's satire. After this metamorphosis by the river, Marx began to employ this sort of satire in his writing to function as one of his main rhetorical devices.

4

One of the conceptual resources Marx sources from world literature is the use of *inversions* to register what Heinrich Heine called in an 1844 poem "*die verkehrte Welt*," the inverted world.[10]

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10 This essay is grounded in research on the influence of world literature on Karl Marx. Most Marx biographers have written about this influence. It has been directly researched by S. S. Prawer in his *Karl Marx and World Literature* (1976) and also by Jean E. Howard and Crystal Bartolovich in *Great Shakespeareans, Vol. X, Marx and Freud*, (Continuum, 2012). The present author is writing a monograph on Shakespeare's influence on Karl Marx, forthcoming from Routledge.

> Das ist ja die verkehrte Welt,
> Wir gehen auf den Köpfen! (2007, 470)

> This is certainly the inverted world
> We go about on our heads.

The image of inversion here registers the new economics, the capitalist world system which was consolidated through mercantilism in the 17th century. The shock of the new money economy, which throws the whole world on its head, is also registered in many of Shakespeare's plays. This is visible in these lines from *Timon of Athens*, which Marx quotes in almost all of his economic writings;

> Gold? Yellow, glittering, precious gold?
> …
> Thus much of this will make
> Black white, foul fair, wrong right,
> Base noble, old young, coward valiant.
> Ha, you gods, why this? What this, you gods? Why, this
> Will lug your priests and servants from your sides,
> Pluck stout men's pillows from below their heads.
> This yellow slave
> Will knit and break religions, bless the accursed,
> Make the hoar leprosy adored, place thieves
> And give them title, knee and approbation
> With senators on the bench: This is it
> That makes the wappered widow wed again,
> She whom the spittle house and ulcerous sores
> Would cast gorge at, this embalms and spices
> To th'April day again. Come, damned earth,
> Thou common whore of mankind that puts odds
> Among the rout of nations, I will make thee
> Do thy right nature. (4.3.26-46)[11]

Marx read these lines first in the Dorothea Tieck translation, which translates damned *earth* as *Verdammt Metall*, to make sure that German readers understood that Shakespeare meant for Timon to rant against the gold, not the earth (4.3.42).[12]

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11 All lines quoted from *Timon of Athens* are from the Arden edition, 2008.
12 All lines quoted in German are from the Schlegel-Tieck Shakespeare edition, 2003.

Marx wrote that "Shakespeare excellently depicts the real nature of money," (*MECW, V3,* 324). The lines prophetically register the deadly inversions caused by the financial imperative, which was only just beginning in Shakespeare's time. The inversion causes an injustice. As such, it carries potential energy that clamours for justice; it is a wrong that demands to be righted. When Marx inserts these lines into his text, he transfers the *Drang* from the lines into his theory. Shakespeare's depiction of the "real nature of money" loads the contradiction of the inversions into Marx's critique. The resolution of the inversions appears logically as the overthrow of the system that causes the contradiction.

In his political journalism, Marx quotes from Shakespeare's *King John*, a play containing one of the first uses of the word *commodity* in an economic sense. He uses the notion of commodity's inversion from Shakespeare's play in his critique of mid-nineteenth century British imperialism. Shakespeare's text is set in the early 13th century, but it is riddled with anachronisms which indicate that Shakespeare meant for the inversions depicted in the setting to be applicable as a registration of the inversions in his time as well. The Bastard speaks this soliloquy:

> Mad world, mad kings, mad composition!
> John, to stop Arthur's title in the whole,
> Hath willingly departed with a part;
> And France, whose armour conscience buckled on,
> Whom zeal and charity brought to the field
> As God's own soldier, rounded in the ear
> With that purpose-changer, that sly devil,
> That broker that still breaks the pate of faith,
> That daily break-vow, he that wins of all,
> Of kings, of beggars, old men, young men, maids,–
> Who having no external thing to lose
> But the word maid, cheats the poor maid of that
> That smooth-faced gentleman, tickling commodity;
> Commodity, the bias of the world,
> The world who of itself is peisèd well,
> Made to run even upon even ground,
> Till this advantage, this vile-drawing bias,
> This sway of motion, this commodity,
> Makes it take head from all indifference,
> From all direction, purpose, course, intent;
> And this same bias, this commodity,
> This bawd, this broker, this all-changing word,

> Clapped on the outward eye of fickle France,
> Hath drawn him from his own determined aid,
> From a resolved and honourable war,
> To a most base and vile-concluded peace.
> And why rail I on this commodity?
> But for because he hath not wooed me yet–
> Not that I have the power to clutch my hand
> When his fair angels would salute my palm,
> But for my hand, as unattempted yet,
> Like a poor beggar, raileth on the rich.
> Well, whiles I am a beggar I will rail
> And say there is no sin but to be rich,
> And being rich, my virtue then shall be
> To say there is no vice but beggary.
> Since kings break faith upon commodity,
> Gain, be my lord, for I will worship thee.
> (2.1.562-99)[13]

Marx alludes to these lines in an article written for the *New York Daily Tribune* on 31 March 1857 called, "The Coming Election in England". The italicised lines are from *King John,* 1.1 and 2.1. The opening is an allusion to *Richard III.* Marx writes:

> "Stand between two churchmen, good my Lord;
> For on that ground I'll make a holy descant."
> Palmerston does not exactly comply with the advice tendered by Buckingham to Richard III. He stands between the churchman on the one side, and the opium-smuggler on the other. While the Low Church bishops, whom the veteran imposter allowed the Earl of Shaftesbury, his kinsman, to nominate, vouch his "righteousness," the opium-smugglers, the dealers in *"sweet poison for the age's tooth"* vouch his faithful service to *"commodity, the bias of the world."* Burke, the Scotchman, was proud of the London "Resurrectionists." So is Palmerston of the Liverpool "poisons." These *smooth-face gentlemen* are the worthy representatives of a town, the pedigree of whose greatness may be directly traced back to the slave trade (*MECW, V15*, 219).

The smooth-faced commodity in the 13th century setting of *King John* inverts honourable warfare and diplomacy between England and France. Similar to

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13 All lines from *King John* are taken from the Arden edition 2018.

Timon's rant, the Bastard's soliloquy also contains a list of money's inversions. Unlike Timon, who is steadfast and tragic in his opposition to the moneyed world, the Bastard is himself corrupted by the promise of gain. While capitalism is not yet visible in the 13th century, aspects of commodification appear, especially during the reign of the historical King John. Shakespeare uses the distant setting of King John's time to register the contradictions of commodity relations, whose historical origins as early capitalism make their appearance in the mid 1590s in London, when Shakespeare wrote *King John*. By citing *King John* in his critique of British imperialism, Marx is using the pressure the play's inversions exert on the reader's consciousness to act similarly for the contemporary contradictions he is critiquing. The logic in Shakespeare's literature transfers very well to Marx's journalism, because the settings of the play, the writing of the play and Marx's use of the play are each set in significant time periods in the development of commodity relations. During King John's 13th century, feudalism underwent a transformation that prepared for its future replacement by capitalism, which began at the end of Shakespeare's 16th century, and reached its first mature modern phase in Marx's mid-to-late 19th century.[14] Commodity relations caused social inversions in all three periods. The unfolding of the solution to these inversions logically derives the imperative to overthrow the capitalist system.

At the end of the section in *Capital Vol. 1* where Marx derives the central mechanism of capitalist inversion—commodity fetishism—Marx reaches for Shakespeare again. He writes:

> The mysterious character of the commodity form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. (Marx, 1977, 164)
>
> …as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head…(*auf den Kopf*) (Marx 1977, 163)

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14 The historical John's father, Henry II, changed the relationship between the crown and the barons. Instead of using the customary temporary loans of knights from each baron to fight his wars, he asked for money from them so that he could fund his own army. Not only did this replace some feudal relations with monetary relations, but it was also an early gesture towards the construction of the modern nation-state with its own standing army. Henry II also centralised the power of the government and institutionalised legal reforms (Halliday 49). His son Richard I, John's brother, put much up for sale—privileges, lordships, earldoms, sheriffdoms, castles and towns—to fund his Crusades (Warren 38). This was a step in the commodification of what was formerly feudal right. The germ of modern capitalist relations was present in the feudal period during King John's reign.

Commodity fetishism, the most pernicious form of social inversions, can lead to a complete takeover of one's intellectual and psychological capacities that not only blinds one to the inner workings of capitalism, but also causes one to fall in devotional love with its supreme idol, money. Marx turns to the topsy-turvey world of *Much Ado About Nothing* to express the problem of commodity fetishism. This is his final paragraph in that section:

> So far no chemist has ever discovered exchange-value either in a pearl or a diamond. The economists who have discovered this chemical substance ... nevertheless find that the use-value of material objects belongs to them independently of their material properties, while their (exchange-)value, on the other hand, forms a part of them as objects. What confirms them in this view is the peculiar circumstance that the use-value of a thing is realised without exchange, i.e. in the direct relation between the thing and man, while inversely, its value is realised only in exchange, i.e. in a social process. Who would not call to mind at this point the advice given by the good Dogberry to the night-watchman Seacoal? 'to be a well-favoured man is the gift of fortune; but reading and writing comes by nature' (Marx 1977, 177).

Much Ado is one of Shakespeare's comedies that swerves the closest to tragedy. A strong device is needed to transform the plot direction back towards comedy. That will be carried out by the character that Marx quotes at the end of *Capital* Chapter 1. The night before the wedding of Hero and Claudio, Dogberry, the inept constable, assembles his night watch. Dogberry speaks in inverted malapropisms— 'dissemble' instead of assemble, 'salvation' instead of damnation, 'desertless' instead of deserving—and delivers orders that invert the expected job of a night watch. He tells them that if they should encounter a vagrant they should order him to stand, but that if he does not stand, then they should take no note of him because he is a knave; and that if they meet a thief they may suspect him to be no true man and let him 'steal out of [their] company'. It is during this night watch briefing that Dogberry speaks the inversion quoted by Marx. Dogberry and his watch are depicted as wholly incapable of noting crime and apprehending it. However, that night they accidently come across one of Don John's conspirators bragging about the trick he played on Claudio and Hero to derail their wedding. The night watch apprehend the character and take him to the Governor, Hero's father. Dogberry's verbal incompetence tries the Governor's patience and the Governor proceeds to the fateful wedding without hearing the information he needs to avert the tragedy. The events at the wedding drive the play into tragic depths; Hero is falsely accused of infidelity, condemned and abandoned by both her husband-to-be and her father, swoons and appears to die. After the wedding, the constable is finally able

to deliver his report about the plot on Hero's reputation and the play is re-directed back towards a comedic ending. Dogberry is the dialectical change agent of this play.[15] His ineptitude inverts his post. This causes him to be unable to deliver his report in a timely manner before the wedding. However, this works out for another set of lovers, Benedick and Beatrice, because it causes them to be confronted by the tragic events at Hero's wedding, and unites them in love through the mediation of their sympathy for Hero. When Dogberry finally delivers the report to the Governor, he is the agent that spins the play around again. Hero and Claudio finally marry alongside Beatrice and Benedick. These vertiginous inversions in Shakespeare's plays are useful for Marx to depict the vertiginous inversions that exchange-value causes in the economy and its superstructures.

Alongside his quotations from *Timon of Athens*, Marx also quotes Goethe's *Faust*.

In the *1844 Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Marx writes:

> By possessing the property of buying everything, by possessing the property of appropriating all objects, money is thus the object of eminent possession. The universality of its property is the omnipotence of its being. It is therefore regarded as omnipotent… Money is the procurer between man's need and the object, between his life and his means of life. But that which mediates my life for me, also mediates the existence of other people for me. For me it is the other person (*MECW, V3*, 323).

Then Marx quotes from *Faust:*

> "What, man! Confound it, hands and feet
> And head and backside, all are yours!
> And what we take while life is sweet,
> Is that to be declared not ours?
>> Six stallions, say, I can afford,
>> Is not their strength my property?
>> I run on, a fine man,
>> As if I had twenty-four legs" (323).[16]

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15 In the 1870s, while Marx and his family were living in London, they began a Shakespeare reading club called the Dogberry Club, which met at their home. This constituted one part of Eleanor Marx's project to use Shakespeare readings and criticism to teach and radicalise late C19 workers for the union struggle and the revolution. This is a direct example of using literary criticism to create activists. It is discussed in the present author's monograph, *Shakespeare's Influence on Karl Marx* (forthcoming, Routledge).

16 Translation corrected by author

Then Marx writes the entire *Timon* quotation that he uses throughout his economics: from 4.3.26 to 44 and also from 4.3.377 to 387. His interpretation of these two literary quotations introduces his theories of commodity fetishism and alienation. Marx writes:

> Shakespeare excellently depicts the real nature of money. To understand him, let us begin, first of all, by expounding the passage from Goethe.
>
> That which is for me through the medium of money—that for which I can pay (i.e., which money can buy)—that am I myself, the possessor of the money. The extent of the power of money is the extent of my power. Money's properties are my—the possessor's—properties and essential powers. Thus, what I am and am capable of is by no means determined by my individuality. I am ugly, but I can buy for myself the most beautiful of women. Therefore, I am not ugly, for the effect of ugliness—its deterrent power—is nullified by money. I according to my individual characteristics am lame, but money furnishes me with twenty-four feet.…Does not my money, therefore, transform all my incapacities into their contrary? (*MECW, V3*, 324).

The lines from *Faust* are spoken by Mephistopheles when he is closing the deal for Faust's soul. There are two conceits in these lines that are useful for Marx. First, money makes the impossible possible. It is the procurer and transformer of all. Second, it appears that, in the money economy, the capacities to do all this lie in money itself. The last two lines in the quotation are, "Ich renne zu und bin ein rechter Mann,/ Als hätt ich vierundzwanzig Beine" (Goethe 1997, 1826-7).[17] The character in Mephistopheles' example tears along using the strength of the six stallions he has purchased, as if that strength were the strength of his own legs. In this same manner, Mephistopheles is offering Faust the strength of the devil for the price of Faust's soul. In Marx's passage above, he says that he is lame in his individual characteristics, but that money has furnished him with twenty-four feet, an allusion to Mephistopheles' promise of six stallions (six stallions times four feet each equals twenty-four). In the metaphor, 'I' stands for the commodity capital, and the stallions stand for the real source of value, the working class.

Alongside his *Timon* quotations in both *Capital, Vol. 1* (1977, 229) and *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (*MECW, V29,* 451), Marx also quotes Sophocles' *Antigone*. The lines are spoken by Creon when he is told by a sentinel that someone has attempted to bury Polynices, whom Creon has declared unworthy of burial. Creon assumes that someone did it for payment and says:

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17 I run on and am a fine man/ As if I had twenty-four legs.

> Money! Nothing worse
> In our lives, so current, rampant, so corrupting.
> Money – you demolish cities, root men from their homes,
> You train and twist good minds and set them on
> To the most atrocious schemes. No limit,
> You make them adept at every kind of outrage,
> Every godless crime – money!

In *Capital,* Marx uses the quotation to illustrate that, "ancient society therefore denounced it [gold] as tending to destroy the economic and moral order." He then writes, "Modern society, which already in its infancy had pulled Pluto by the hair of his head from the bowels of the earth, greets gold as the Holy Grail, as the glittering incarnation of its innermost principle of life," and he adds a quotation from Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae:* "Avarice hopes to drag Pluto himself out of the bowels of the earth" (*MECW, V29,* 451).[18]

In the *Outline to the Critique of Political Economy*, a set of notebooks Marx wrote from late 1857 to May 1858 (*Grundrisse),* he quotes from *Timon of Athens* and Virgil's *Aeneid:*

> The exchangeability of all products, activities, relationships for a third, objective entity, which in turn can be exchanged for everything without distinction – in other words, the development of exchange values (and of monetary relationships) is identical with general venality, with corruption. General prostitution appears as a necessary phase in the development of the social character of personal inclinations, capacities, abilities, activities. More politely expressed: the universal relationship of utility and usefulness. Equating the incommensurate, as Shakespeare appropriately conceived of money. [footnote here: 'Thou visible god, that solder'st close impossibilities."] The craving for enrichment as such is impossible without money; all other accumulation and craving for accumulation appears merely natural, restricted, conditioned on the one hand by needs and on the other hand by the restricted nature of the products (sacra auri famas) (*MECW, V15,* 99-100).

This passage contains Marx's theory of money as the objective entity that is used as the general equivalent and his metaphor in which the prostitute stands for the general venality and corruption that springs from the money economy. The passage then presents a third image, "the accursed passion for gold," from Book 3 of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

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18 Marx cites this quotation from Demetrius Phalereus in a tract about the digging of gold in mines.

This quotation comes from the story of Aeneas' attempt to set up a town on the shores of Thrace after escaping the destruction of Troy. The Thracians were once allied with the Trojans. The Trojan king, Priam, had sent Polydorus there during the war with some gold. When it became clear to the king of Thrace that the Trojans were losing the war, he switched to the Greek side, killed Polydorus and seized the gold. Aeneas discovers this when he tries to pull up some trees to make shelters, but the trees turn out to be the buried Polydorus, who tells him about his tragic fate. Aeneas is deeply affected and speaks the lines: "*quid non mortalia pectora cogis, auri sacra fames!*"[19] (Virgil 1986, 3.57)

Marx also quotes from and alludes to Miguel de Cervantes' texts, including *Don Quixote* and *Coloquio de los perros*. There are at least sixty-one instances of Cervantes intertextuality in Marx's texts and more in Engels' writings.[20] In *Capital Vol. 1,* Marx uses a scene from *Don Quixote* in his theory of commodity relations. He writes:

> What chiefly distinguishes a commodity from its owner is the fact that it looks upon every other commodity as but the form of appearance of its own value. A born leveller and a cynic, it is always ready to exchange not only soul, but body, with any and every other commodity, be it more repulsive than Maritornes herself (*1977, 179*).

Maritornes is an ugly and repulsive character that Don Quixote meets when he arrives at a country inn, which he takes to be a castle. She is a servant at the inn and is described as, "an Asturian girl with a broad face, a back of head that was flat, a nose that was snubbed, and one eye that was blind, while the other was not in very good condition" (Cervantes 2003, 109). Don Quixote, under the influence of his madness, which serves, similar to Dogberry's incompetence, as the dialectical change agent of the novel, believes that she is the Goddess of Beauty. Cervantes writes:

> He touched her chemise, and though it was made of burlap, to him it seemed the finest and sheerest silk. On her wrists she wore glass beads, but he imagined them to be precious pearls of the Orient. Her tresses, which were rather like a horse's mane, he deemed strands of shining Arabian gold whose brilliance made the sun seem dim. And her breath, which undoubtedly smelled of yesterday's

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19 To what lengths will man's passion for gold not lead him?
20 This comes from research conducted by the present author on Cervantes' influence on Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It has not been published yet. S. S. Prawer (1978) also discusses some of Marx's Cervantian quotations and allusions.

stale salad, seemed to him a soft, aromatic scent wafting from her mouth (Cervantes, 2003, 113).

Marx's allusion works to register the utter contradiction in the composition of commodities. The scene in the novel works as it does, because Maritornes, who is repulsive "enough to make any man…vomit," is taken by Don Quixote to be the Goddess of Beauty. Similarly, in the commodity, human labour which produces specific products for use, can only acquire value when it is alienated into its opposite, abstract social labour, to be exchanged as a commodity. Under the sway of commodity relations and fetishism, only exchange value, with its vile imperative to exploit and accumulate, seems enticing.

Still there is another layer of meaning in Marx's allusion. Towards the end of Part One of the novel, Don Quixote returns to the inn where Maritornes is a servant. She and the innkeeper's daughter decide to play a trick on him. Don Quixote is stationed outside, on his horse, protecting the inn, which he still thinks is a castle. He is lamenting to himself about his love for his lady, Dulcinea. The girls call to him from a window in the loft in an attempt to make him perjure his fidelity for Dulcinea. In his mind, he sees two damsels standing behind the golden grillwork of a castle window, calling amorously to him. Maritornes asks for Don Quixote's hand to satisfy her desire for a man, whom her father has prevented her from seeing. For the sake of the damsel in sexual distress, Don Quixote sacrifices his absolute fidelity to his lady and gives Maritornes his hand. The ugly servant, meanwhile, has prepared a slip knot in the halter of Sancho Panza's donkey and places it over Quixote's wrist. She ties the other end to a lock on the loft door and leaves the knight dangling painfully with his arm tied in the halter. He must spend the rest of the night in this torture position. When this problem from the story is layered into Marx's text, it offers the image of this betrayal and torture to Marx's unfolding logic that workers who sell their labour power enter into an inverted world of painful exploitation. Capitalism hurts. It hurts its human players in the manner in which they are the most vulnerable. Marx's use of Cervantes in his text carries not only the weight of Quixote's pain in it, but also the contradiction that pushes for resolution.

5

With each instance of inversion sourced from world literature that Marx inserts in his critique of capitalism, he transfers into his text the impulse of the contradiction to resolve itself. This contradiction registers, in the form and content of the literature, the actual contradictions in the author's world. As such, when the literature is used by Marx in his critique of his present world, it exerts

the force of the historical struggle—abstracted, concentrated and amplified—to oppose and resolve the contradictions. In the case of the examples discussed in this paper, it can be seen that poets and writers throughout literary history, from Homer to Shakespeare to Heine, have registered the vile tendency of money to invert the world into chaos and brutality. Commodity relations are shown to be inimical to a just society, a good life and an ethical world. They convert every part of human life into the profit motive, and thereby invert good into bad, fair into foul. Marxism shows that capitalism is riddled with fundamental contradictions which not only exploit workers and damage social relations, but will also destroy the planet and capitalism itself. Marx's texts unfold the problem using documentation, critique and literary intertextuality. The activist step that arises from the logic of Marxism is clear, obvious and necessary—capitalism must be overthrown and it is the historical task of its victims—the proletariat—to do this.

In 1845, Marx wrote a thesis that can be understood as the imperative for the move from theory to activism: "Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden *interpretiert*, es kömmt drauf an, sie zu *verändern*." (Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it.) (*MECW, V5,* 5). In 1848, Marx and Engels actualised this thesis by calling for the overthrow of capitalism and its states in their *Communist Manifesto*. At that point, Marx's method was no longer German idealism; it proceeded using dialectical logic in a materialist manner, no longer restrained by the transcendentalism of Kant or the idealism of Hegel. Marx's dialectical materialism makes the unfolding from theory to activism imperative.[21]

Similarly, literary criticism is well-placed to unfold clear, obvious and necessary logic which leads to revolutionary activism. As in Marx's texts, but differently organised, the ingredients for the activist conclusion from literary criticism are all there: the well-formed artwork of literature and the critical theory that interprets it. Both the artwork and the theory unfold an imperative for social change. The artwork does so when it confronts the subject and provides the conditions for his de-reification. The criticism does so when it interprets the contradictions folded in the artwork and presents them to the reader/student/scholar as a social problem. The next step is already sitting restless in the interpretation; its urge is the imperative to confront the problem and overthrow its cause.

Feminist literary criticism contains the logic of activism to confront sexism

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21 An obvious note to mention here is that "Marxism" and "dialectical materialism" have been the stated theoretical groundwork of many revolutionary movements in world history. The aim of this essay is not to focus on any of that history. For one example of the role of literary criticism in a real-existing socialist situation see the chapter on the German Shakespeare Society in the German Democratic Republic in Christa Jansohn's 2006 book, *German Shakespeare Studies at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*. Newark: U of Delaware.

and misogyny. Critical Race Studies contains the logic of activism to confront racism and white supremacy. Queer theory contains the logic of activism to confront not only homophobia and Queer bashing, but also the very straightness of knowledge. And so on for postcolonial criticism, ecocriticism, disability studies, animal studies, and all the other similar subfields of literary criticism.[22]

6

Who will be the activist? Capitalism creates the very class struggle which will overthrow it. On the one side stands the global oligarchic ruling class and on the other side stands the exploited working class, whose interests are to resolve the contradictions by overthrowing capitalism. If this revolution were to be carried out, history would be moved into its next stage, which has been called by Marx and others, *communism*.

However, the activism of the working class does not always end up being revolutionary. Historically, there have been two general directions in which the working class move to resolve the contradictions of their exploitation by capitalists. Broadly, opponents of capitalism proceed towards some variant of fascism or, in the opposite direction, some variant of socialism and communism. The move towards fascism is usually grounded in and funded by strong emotions and potent nostalgia. Conversely, the move towards socialism and communism requires logic, and is usually led by revolutionaries whose minds labour in theory.

In his early journalism, Marx writes about the role of philosophy in confronting societal contradictions. The material needs of people—the struggle of the flesh and blood—present themselves *first*. In his article on press freedom, Marx writes that the role of the press is to serve as a practice where humans could reflect critically on their selves and their societies. Through this practice of self-reflection and criticism of their needs and desires and of the structures of society they construct to satisfy these yearnings, humans produce the abstraction *Geist—a consciousness of their self in the world*. This philosophical abstraction arises from material needs and elevates material needs to the level of philosophical logic (*MEGA 1.1,* 183).

However, philosophical thinking is difficult, time consuming, and appears weak in the face of oppression which clamours for immediate action. Hegel also understood this, and, though he felt that doing philosophy was the best path towards constructing a rational, free and just society which was grounded

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22 Literary criticism is not only further complicated but also amplified by intersectionality such as class and race analysis, gender and race analysis, and the interpretation of ecocriticism in light of postcolonial theory, to name but a few.

in mutual recognition and the unfolding of the Idea as the Absolute, he also understood that the people needed another way to glimpse the Absolute. For Hegel, this was the role of religion and art. Both religion and art construct objects which encapsulate the Absolute and confront the subject with a well-formed version of the Absolute.

Marxist critique of religion holds that religion serves to alleviate the suffering of exploitative conditions by substituting religious feeling for genuine human happiness, and thereby allowing the contradictions and injustices of the world to remain unchallenged. Religion cannot be revolutionary.[23]

Art, on the other hand, does have a role to play in the revolution. Accordingly, Marx inserted hundreds of lines, images, rhetoric, scenes, and concepts from world literature into his revolutionary writings, writings which Marx intended to generate activism that leads to revolution. Marx believed that art could allow subjects to glimpse the unfolding of the revolution. In Hegel's philosophy, the activist power of art remained latent, for, in his method, the logic unfolds on its own, not as the material actions of real people in history. For Hegel, art only showed people the absolute Idea; it did not stimulate them to construct it. Marx's revolutionary dialectical materialism inverts this notion, thereby making the latent activist dialectic manifest.

To stand for the revolution in his writings, Marx recruits two of Shakespeare's characters: Hamlet and Robin Goodfellow. Marx inserts an image from *Hamlet* into the logic of the *Communist Manifesto*. He writes:

> Alle festen, eingerosteten Verhältnisse mit ihrem Gefolge von altehrwürdigen Vorstellungen und Anschauungen werden aufgelöst, alle neugebildeten veralten, ehe sie verknöchern können. Alles Ständische und Stehende verdampft (1999, 23).

> All fixed, rusted-up relations, with their train of ancient and venerable ideas and views, are dissolved, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is corporative and standing evaporates.[24]

This is an allusion to Hamlet's first soliloquy: "O that this too too solid flesh would melt,/ Thaw and resolve itself into a dew" (1.2.129-130),[25] which is rendered in

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23 See the *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (*MEGA I.2*)

24 The last line is sometimes mistranslated as "All that is solid melts into air." The word *Ständische* also connotes the estates that existed in C19 Prussia. Marx meant that they too will be erased by modern capitalism.

25 All lines from *Hamlet* are taken from the Arden Edition, 2006.

German by Marx's university professor, August W. Schlegel: "O schmölze doch dies allzu feste Fleisch,/ Zergin', und löst' in einen Tau sich auf!"

The *Communist Manifesto* corrects and continues the dialectic in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right.* Hegel's comedic closures—private property, the family, the corporation, and the state—are sublated by Marx and Engels, as *required* by Hegel's dialectical method. This dialectical unfolding towards revolution is the manifest *freedom* of the philosophy carried out by *real* historical actors. In Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he writes that *Geist* has been progressing through history towards its goal to know itself. Hegel writes:

> Spirit often seems to have forgotten and lost itself, but inwardly opposed to itself, it is inwardly working ever forward (as when Hamlet says of the ghost of his father, "Well said, old mole! canst work i' the ground so fast?") until grown strong in itself it bursts asunder the crust of earth which divided it from the sun, its Notion, so that the earth crumbles away (Hegel *Vorlesungen*, 456)

Marx picks up this conceit and changes the goal of the consciousness. Instead of the abstraction *Geist* knowing itself to be the absolute Idea, in Marx's 1852 *18th Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte,* the revolutionary *Geist* of the proletariat is triggered, by the "the old mole", revolutionary consciousness that has been burrowing underground in Europe (*MECW, V11*). In his speech at the anniversary of the *People's Paper* in 1856, Marx will mix Puck, the dialectical change agent in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with King Hamlet as ghost together in an image. He writes: "We do recognise our brave friend, Robin Goodfellow, the old mole that can work in the earth so fast, that worthy pioneer – the Revolution" (1996) Hamlet, the prince and philosopher, learns from his father-as-ghost, who he calls an "old mole" who "canst work i'th' earth so fast" (1.5.161), that he was murdered by Claudius. He makes some decisions: that Denmark is rotten, that he has been wronged, and that he is the one to set it right. The first two are the contradictions that seek resolution, and the third is the activist imperative. Hamlet, who has been accused by some critics of exemplifying bad revolutionary strategy because he goes it alone, actually begins his organising immediately after stating that he must take action:

> The time is out of joint; O cursed spite
> That ever I was born to set it right!
> Nay, come, let's go together. (1.5.186-8)

To whom is he speaking his last line? To Horatio and Marcellus, to the audience, or to both, as theatrical lines can do.

Hamlet will use art, in this case theatre, for his activism. At the end of his "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" soliloquy, where he wonders how the First Actor can produce tears in himself through his acting of Priam and Hecuba, Hamlet decides to expose Claudius' crime and raise consciousness in the court by staging a play that represents and mirrors the usurper's deeds. Hamlet ends his soliloquy with: "The play's the thing/ Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King."

The other character depicted by Marx as the revolution is Robin Goodfellow, the puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Robin is the dialectical change agent of the play. He performs most of the metamorphoses of the play. When he comes upon the Mechanicals in the woods, he notices that they are rehearsing for a play. He decides that he will be an "auditor" or "an actor too… if [he] see[s] cause" (3.1.74-5).[26] As the transformative power of art personified, Robin Goodfellow is teamed up with Hamlet's father to awaken the consciousness of Marx's readers and listeners and to unfold the activist logic required for action from the need to resolve the contradictions he finds.[27] This activist logic, sourced from literature and criticism, can function as a pathway along which theory can be transformed from interpretive to activist.

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Tracing Emmett Till's Legacy from Black Lives Matter back to the Civil Rights Movement

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Abstract

This paper explores the legacy of the Emmett Till case as one of the core elements which binds together the Civil Rights Movement and the current Black Lives Matter in the US. Donald Trump's inauguration in January 2017 has magnified the escalating racial tension of recent years and has, at the same time, fueled several forms of social activism across the United States. Acting as the catalyst for Black Lives Matter, the assassination of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin in 2012 stirred the race question in the country as the Till lynching had similarly done fifty seven years before. At the dawn of the Civil Rights Movement, the complex relations between race, class, and gender within the South helped to set the atmosphere for one of the starkest assassinations in US history. Till's infamous murder soon gave rise to an empowering narrative among the African American community that not only contributed to putting an end to the voracious rule of Jim Crow in the US South but that, with the passage of time, has also become a banner of justice in the current fight against racism, as it seems that recent violent events resuscitate the latent white supremacist ghosts of one of the world's most powerful nations.

Keywords: Emmett Till; Civil Rights Movement; Black Lives Matter; racism; white supremacy

1. Introduction

The figure of Emmett Till has never left the African American collective imaginary and, as the 2018 reopening of the case evinces, it remains a matter of great social relevance in the United States. Although the reason that led the Trump administration to reinvestigate the gruesome lynching was most likely a bid to redeem its public image after the disgraceful family separation crisis of the summer of 2018—something that, according to Timothy Tyson (2018), constitutes a "civil rights charade" given Trump's attacks on voting rights—, the reopening confirms that the structures of power also acknowledge the case's current weight within US society. Emmett Till was one of the major catalysts for the Civil Rights Movement and, since then, his figure has become a banner of justice for African American activism. His image is frequently spotted at rallies against police brutality in the country and his story has been, and is, invoked by the mothers of the recent victims as a means of establishing a network of mourning but, at the same time, empowerment. That is one of the virtues of Black Lives Matter for, as Claudia Rankine (2016, 151) notes, "[u]nlike earlier black-power movements that tried to fight or segregate for self-preservation, [Black Lives Matter] aligns with the death, continues the mourning, and refuses the forgetting in front of all of us." The movement configures a space of resistance against white supremacy that also recognises its black victims and which fights against racism now, but also bears in mind the triumphs and failures of the past. Being acquainted with the past becomes crucial in the current fight since, in the end, as Jesmyn Ward (2016, 6) contends we can, "[r]eplace ropes with bullets. Hound dogs with German shepherds. A gray uniform with a bulletproof vest. Nothing is new."

Back in the obscure times of the Jim Crow South, fourteen-year-old black Chicago youth Emmett Till decided to spend his summer vacations with his southern relatives in Money, Mississippi, and, four days after his arrival down south, an innocent fleeting encounter in a local store would trigger one of the cruelest assassinations in the history of the US. The whole truth about what happened on that fateful Wednesday, August 24, 1955 has never been clarified and will never be known for sure. Countless versions have been produced of the "less than a minute" (Wright and Boyd 2011, 50) that the fourteen-year-old African American boy allegedly spent alone with the white storekeeper Carolyn Bryant; but what is clear is that this encounter would lead, days later, to his infamous lynching in the Mississippi Delta. According to historian Devery S. Anderson (2015, 28), who has written one of the most updated and insightful revisitations of the case, the most likely version of the incident is the following: Emmett Till entered in the store to buy some bubble gum, allegedly said or did

something *inappropriate* according to southern etiquette to Carolyn Bryant, and then left the store escorted by his cousin Simeon Wright, who had stepped inside just in case there was trouble. Apart from that, Till apparently wolf-whistled at the woman when she walked out of the store afterward but, although many would later call it the wolf-whistle case, there is no historiographic agreement on this detail. Whether there was a wolf-whistle or not, that fleeting interaction between the young African American boy and the white southern storekeeper would be what, four days later, unleashed the cruelest facet of white supremacy and led Carolyn Bryant's relatives to perpetrate the gruesome lynching.

Just after midnight on Sunday, August 28, 1955, Emmett Till was abducted from his uncle's home to then be savagely beaten and shot dead by southern white supremacists Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, respectively Carolyn Bryant's husband and brother-in-law. His battered body remained three days at the bottom of the Tallahatchie River tied with barbed wire to a heavy metal gin fan until a local fisherman found it floating on the dark waters of the river. Thanks to the tenacity of his mother, the boy's open-casket funeral later helped to raise awareness of the insidious level of antiblack violence to which the black community was subjected in the country and, according to David Halberstam (1993, 437), this infamous case wound up constituting "the first great media event of the Civil Rights Movement." While millions of overwhelmed US citizens closely followed the legal outcome of the lynching, Till's killers were tried for their crimes in southern courts and eventually acquitted of the boy's murder by an all-white and all-male jury after a sixty-seven-minute deliberation, which would have been shorter had they not taken a break to drink soda. Weeks later, Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam were also acquitted of the remaining kidnapping charge despite having previously admitted to Till's abduction and, in exchange for 4,000 dollars, they openly confessed their heinous crime in an article published in the January 24, 1956 issue of *Look* magazine since, given the Double Jeopardy Clause of the US Constitution, they could not be prosecuted again for the same legal causes after their acquittals. The outrage of the African American community raised by the infamous case acted as a catalyst for the incipient Civil Rights Movement and, for more than six decades, his tragic story has continued to fuel various forms of social activism across the US as it seems that, despite the passage of time, the latent white supremacist ghosts of the country are experiencing a steady revival over the course of recent years.

2. The Glorious White National Past and the Geographies of Criminalizing Black People

With Charlottesville's Unite the Right rally in August 2017, white supremacist symbols and chants were displayed and sung by those in attendance and the

presence of a proud US far-right was made visible before the incredulous eyes of that part of the country still unaffected by the endemic racial hatred that stalks black people's lives each day. Donald Trump's refusal to explicitly denounce the rally's white nationalists, together with his statement blaming both protesters and counter-protesters for the violent outcome have helped to normalize the xenophobic discourse of the far-right. His inauguration as 46th President of the United States in January 2017 had magnified an already existing climate of escalating racial tension after a presidential campaign that focused on isolationist trade policies, the reinforcement of law and order, and racially provocative anti-immigration policies—with a relentless and ruthless rhetorical attack on the US-Mexican border. The combination of these last two resulted in the infamous family separation policy which, between May and June 2018, originated a humanitarian crisis given the inhuman conditions of the affected children and parents. Trump's famous campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again," was an invocation to a romanticized vision of the past which, if anything, was not so great for all Americans. Just take, for instance, the harsh state repression targeting the African American community during the civil rights era; the images of firefighters hosing peaceful protesters, German shepherds attacking them, and white people filled with racial hatred throwing stones at black students who were attending college or punching, kicking, and beating African Americans who were claiming basic rights to access public spaces like eateries, hotels, schools, and workplaces. Given this historical context, what does Make America Great Again actually mean?

Well into the years of slavery, racial ideology sprung up in the United States and then progressively infected and spread across the sociocultural pattern of the country. In her celebrated article, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," Barbara Jeanne Fields (1990, 106) analyzes the formation of "[r]ace as a coherent ideology" and details how it "did not spring into being simultaneously with slavery, but took even more time than slavery did to become systematic." The conflicts between the Euro-American elites of the colonies, who pushed as far as they could in the exploitation of their workers, and the white indentured servants, who could, as a large social group, potentially pose a serious threat to the colonial status quo, had eventually resulted in a tacit agreement on the racial divide of the working class in colonial America. While indentured servants were eventually freed from their quasi-slave working conditions, African Americans fell even deeper into the jaws of the slaveholding society. As Fields (108) remarks, if slavery was to survive—even after the United States declared their independence—it "required the white majority to develop its own characteristic form of racial ideology." At the bottom of the US social hierarchy, African Americans suffered the extreme conditions of a slaveholding system which relied on the deprivation of their liberty and the brutalization of their lives in order to exist. Fields (115) characterizes

the resulting racial ideology as "the ideology to be expected in a society in which enslavement stands as an exception to a radically defined liberty so commonplace that no great effort of imagination is required to take it for granted" or, as she succinctly clarifies, "the ideology proper to a 'free' society in which the enslaved descendants of Africans are an anomalous exception."

This *anomalous exception* has evolved and adapted over the passage of time to become an integral part of the US racial ideology. The proliferation of this radical ideology contributed to underpinning the increasing systematization of racial discrimination against black people and spurred the racial hatred of the white supremacist mentality. After the abolition of slavery, the anti-black violence that erupted in the US South during the Reconstruction period evinced the successful role of racial discrimination in the configuration of racial ideology in the country. In *Stamped from the Beginning*, Ibram X. Kendi (2017) explores the history of racism in the United States and contends that, contrary to the popular belief, the alleged historical causality between racial hatred, racist ideas, and racism "has actually been the inverse relationship—racial discrimination led to racist ideas which led to ignorance and hate"(9). Resistance to US racial ideology during the slavery, segregation and mass incarceration eras has been systematically undermined by the production of racist ideas, for, as Kendi (2017, 10) argues, "[t]he principal function of racist ideas in American history has been the suppression of resistance to racial discrimination and its resulting racial disparities." All these issues integrate the larger realms of the US racial ideology and contribute to reinventing and reshaping them in what Kendi describes as a constant "dueling duality" (xi) between the simultaneous history of racial progress and racist progress for, as the historian shows in his book, one can see both "the antiracist force of equality and the racist force of inequality marching forward, progressing in rhetoric, in tactics, in policies" (x).

The post-2016 resurgence of ever-present white supremacist rhetorics along with the ongoing governmental policies which continue to criminalize black people in the United States have awakened a new wave of social activism in the country. Standing now as a convergence of nationwide organizational efforts, Black Lives Matter has become a major social movement which thrives in the contemporary communicational mechanism of social media to share their tenacious message of: "working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically targeted for demise" (Black Lives Matter). The different chapters of the association—i.e. local groups—have been channeling the outrage and frustration of the African American community into an organized tide that fights against the myriad facets of racism. This modern social movement emerged as an urgent reaction to the indiscriminate destruction of black lives during the early 2010s, particularly at the hands of police authorities. Unlike in the past, the racist crimes of police officers are now rapidly

exposed on social media by anonymous bystanders, relatives or friends of the victims to denounce the still extant lack of basic rights that African Americans have to endure every day in the country. Black Lives Matter consciously follows a long tradition of black activism which can be traced from the latest victims of police brutality back to the heinous murder of Emmett Till since, as Christopher Benson (Chamberlain 2015), the University of Illinois professor who co-authored the biography of Emmett Till's mother, reflects in an interview on August 17, 2015, "[b]efore Trayvon Martin, before Michael Brown, before Tamir Rice, there was Emmett Till. This was the first 'Black Lives Matter' story." With an updated scope focused on the ongoing struggle for racial equality, Black Lives Matter activists have joined other voices in denouncing the stark inequalities currently faced by black people before US law, which, although there are others, mainly revolve around three interrelated legal geographies of systemic subjugation of the African American community: mass incarceration, racial profiling, and police brutality.

2.1. The Politics of Carcerality in the Racially Biased Mass Incarceration Era

The situation of African Americans within the US criminal justice system can be explained with data, but it may help to first put it into context by evaluating the political life of civil rights from the vantage point of the US presidency. While still in the White House, former President Barack Obama (2015) made a famous speech at the 106th national convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) where he addressed the issue:

> So let's look at the statistics. The United States is home to 5 percent of the world's population, but 25 percent of the world's prisoners. Think about that. Our incarceration rate is four times higher than China's. We keep more people behind bars than the top 35 European countries combined. And it hasn't always been the case—this huge explosion in incarceration rates. In 1980, there were 500,000 people behind bars in America— half a million people in 1980 […] Today there are 2.2 million. It has quadrupled since 1980. Our prison population has doubled in the last two decades alone.

These (rounded) numbers were admitted to by the, at the time, head of the US government himself and, to them, one could also add the 338,028 prisoners registered in 1970 (Schiraldi & Ziedenberg 2000), the year considered to be the birth of the current mass incarceration era, to give a broader perspective. These statistics account for a history of criminal justice system policies which dates back to Richard Nixon's politics of law and order in the 1970s and which Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton reinforced over their subsequent administrations.

The statistics respond to a US criminal justice system which has systematically criminalized the African American community since at least the end of the Jim Crow era. Back in the 1960s, while the triumphs of the Civil Rights Movement were placing the vision of an end to segregation on the national agenda, white supremacy was breeding new forms of subjugation to overcome this egalitarian blow to its very foundations. As Michelle Alexander (2010, 41) contends in *The New Jim Crow*, by the time the African American community was making progress for equal rights and Martin Luther King Jr.'s inclusive discourse grew within US society, "[t]he racial imagery associated with the riots gave fuel to the argument that civil rights for blacks led to rampant crime." Crime was increasing, according to sociologist John Hagan (DuVernay 2016), "just through sheer demographic change," but blaming the Civil Rights Movement for it became central to some sectors of US politics. This atmosphere put race at the center of the 1968 presidential election and, after a campaign mainly focused on the law and order discourse, Nixon became the 37th President of the United States. His administration focused on the *restoration* of social order and implemented a strong in-depth reform of the criminal justice system which, essentially, set up the black political movements of the time as its main targets.

After its further reinforcement during the Reagan and Bush administrations, the law and order rhetoric, along with its covert effects on the African American community, pervaded the full spectrum of US national politics during the 1992 presidential election. Incumbent Republican President George H.W. Bush was up against Democratic candidate Bill Clinton in a campaign focused on social order where, for the first time, both politicians strongly endorsed the enforcement of the criminal justice system. When Clinton was inaugurated as the 42nd President of the United States, he soon passed his "Three Strikes and You're Out" law—which essentially mandated that a person convicted for a third crime would receive a life sentence—and, years later, followed it with the Federal Crime Bill of 1994. According to a report of the Justice Policy Institute (Feldman et al. 2001, 3), the bill resulted in "the largest increases in federal and state prison inmates of any president in American history" and, by 2000, the inmate population was roughly double the more than one million registered in 1990. This reform perfected the whole structure of the mass incarceration machine with a huge expansion of the criminal infrastructure and, as Craig DeRoche (DuVernay 2016) explains, it led to the "militarization all the way down to small, rural police departments that have SWAT teams."[2] With the passage of time, the bill has proven inefficient

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2   A SWAT (special weapons and tactic) team is a specialized and militarized law enforcement unit which was originally conceived to handle riot control and was eventually used to combat the so-called War on Drugs in the country.

in reducing crime—even Clinton (2015) himself admitted in 2015 to having "signed a bill that made the problem worse"—but it has utterly succeeded as the culmination of a systemic retaliation to the advancements of the Civil Rights Movement. In this, the state has perfected a biased mass incarceration system which, as Alexander (2010, 11) metaphorically describes in her celebrated monograph, has resulted in nothing less than "the New Jim Crow."

Save the obvious differences with Jim Crow, the ongoing mass incarceration era functions as a mechanism of social order which, despite this being a problem across all sections of society, has undeniably targeted black people in particular across the United States. In *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Angela Davis (2003, 16) analyzes the racial bias in the US penal system and explains how, despite the passage of time, "[b]ecause of the persistent power of racism, 'criminals' and 'evildoers' are, in the collective imagination, fantasized as people of color." The statistics reveal a clearly imbalanced situation for the 13.4 percent of the US population comprising the African American community (US Census Bureau 2017). According to 2014 data, "overall blacks are incarcerated at a rate of 1,408 per 100,000 while whites are incarcerated at a rate of 275 per 100,000" (Nellis 2016, 4) and, as reported in 2011 by the Executive Director of The Sentencing Project[3] Marc Mauer (2011, 88) "[i]f current trends continue, 1 of every 3 African American males born today can expect to go to prison in his lifetime, as can 1 of every 6 Latino males, compared to 1 in 17 White males." In addition to this, the records for black female incarceration further confirm the racial disparities of the criminal justice system since, according to the October 2020 bulletin of the Bureau of Justice Statistics, "the imprisonment rate of black females (83 per 100,000 black female U.S. residents) was 1.7 times the rate of white females (48 per 100,000 white female U.S. residents)" (Carson 2020, 16). The racially biased carceral geography of the United States constitutes what Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007, 2) describes in *Golden Gulag* as "a system in which punishment has become as industrialized as making cars, clothes, or missiles, or growing cotton" and which, as Davis (2003, 16) remarks, "functions ideologically as an abstract site into which undesirables are deposited, relieving us of the responsibility of thinking about the real issues afflicting those communities from which prisoners are drawn in such disproportionate numbers."

This voracious machine is designed to grind down black lives and expel them back into society as pariahs. No matter how much or how little time a person may spend behind bars, s/he is released as a second-class citizen and, even when

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3   The Sentencing Project is an organization which "works for a fair and effective U.S. criminal
    justice system by promoting reforms in sentencing policy, addressing unjust racial disparities
    and practices, and advocating for alternatives to incarceration" (The Sentencing Project).

someone does not spend time in prison but is branded a felon, s/he carries the burden of the criminal label for his/her entire life as well. This means that, in the eyes of the system, you are a criminal for the rest of your existence and you are thus deprived of a number of rights which hinder your normal reinsertion into mainstream society. According to Alexander (2010, 92), people convicted for drug addiction or possession of a small amount of drugs, for instance, share the same criminal category—i.e. felons—with all violent offenders and are consequently "barred from public housing by law, discriminated against by private landlords, ineligible for food stamps, forced to 'check the box' indicating a felony conviction on employment applications for nearly every job, and denied licenses for a wide range of professions." Additionally, felons may be permanently denied the right to vote in some of the most restrictive states and are, to a greater or lesser extent, temporarily disenfranchised in all other states except for Maine and Vermont. This situation often pushes people into a cycle where they might likely be convicted again for minor offenses related to, or as a consequence of, their precarious economic conditions. In the end, as Eduardo Mendieta (2004, 54) contends in his insightful essay "Plantations, ghettos, prisons: US racial geographies," prison—and the constricting taint that it leaves on people—"as extension of the ghetto, continues this form of natal alienation and social death through its policies of cultural, social, and political exclusion." Once one acquires second-class status, there is no way out of it within the current system.

2.2. *The Fatal Outcome of Racial Profiling and Police Brutality in the US*

The War on Drugs has played a pivotal role in the creation of modern forms of the subjugation of the African American community, such as the enforcement of laws that have fostered racial profiling. Black people are constantly stopped and frisked by police officers on the streets across the United States for an infinite variety of random reasons under the covert pretext of the police officer being suspicious of, among others, drug possession. The white supremacist mentality has constantly associated African Americans with drugs and crime and, as Alexander (2010, 7) remarks, although "studies show that people of all colors use and sell illegal drugs at remarkably similar rates," the research conducted by Jonathan Rothwell (2014) shows that "[b]lacks remain far more likely than whites to be arrested for selling drugs (3.6 times more likely) or possessing drugs (2.5 times more likely)." The enforcement of the "Stop and Frisk" laws—which oftentimes collide head-on with the 4th Amendment of the US Constitution that, in short, prohibits unreasonable searches and seizures—has, since the dawn of the War on Drugs, bestowed police authorities with an almost totalitarian power which is disproportionally exerted on African Americans. Backed by the

US Supreme Court, police officers have *carte blanche* to criminalize dark-skinned folks and, in the process, undermine their lives with total impunity.

In 2014, the Kalief Browder case was reported on by the national media and exposed the injustices of the criminal justice system. A sixteen-year-old African American high schooler, Browder was going home at night when he was arrested on May 15, 2010 for allegedly stealing a backpack in the Bronx. According to the laws of the State of New York, he could have pled guilty and gone home with the criminal label upon him, but he refused and was thus sent to jail pending trial with a bail of $10,000 which his family could not even dream of paying. After almost three years waiting for a trial on Rikers Island jail complex, several refusals to plead guilty, experiencing all manner of prison violence, and attempts at suicide, he was released a week before the charges against him were dismissed in May 2013. In similar cases, tens of thousands of African Americans plead guilty to crimes that they have not committed due to the fear of irrational mandatory minimums,[4] but Browder maintained his innocence to the last. When he was asked why he did so, in a 2014 interview for ABC News, he responded: "If I would've just pled guilty, then my story would've never been heard. Nobody would've took [sic] the time to listen to me. I'd have been just another criminal" (Browder 2015). His brave determination sought to combat the narrative of the criminalization of the African American community that, more than fifty years ago, had also imbued the social reception of the Emmett Till case. Only two years after his release from prison and periods of severe depression, Browder put an end to his life by hanging himself when he was just twenty-two years old.

Other forms of systemic and police violence towards the African American community are not so subtle, but are equally lethal to its victims, as the ongoing Black Lives Matter movement has been denouncing over the last few years. Founded in 2013, one of the association's pillars revolves around the struggle against police brutality to which black people are exposed daily across the country. Notorious cases, like that of Eric Garner and Michael Brown in 2014 and the subsequent riots in Ferguson, Missouri, have not restrained the impunity of their assassins before the law; and the key of the problem might be that, as Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015, 78) notes in his book *Between the World and Me*, "[t]he truth is that the police reflect America in all of its will and fear." The narrative of the dark-skinned criminal has taken over US idiosyncrasy and, if white racists do not justify the facts by twisting logic and truth to their utmost, a major part of the population remains impassive

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4   For instance, as Alexander (2010, 86) points out, "[t]he typical mandatory sentence for a first-time drug offense in federal court is five or ten years. By contrast, in other developed countries around the world, a first-time drug offense would merit no more than six months in jail, if jail time is imposed at all."

in front of the file footage of black bodies being denigrated, beaten, asphyxiated or shot by police authorities viciously drunk with white supremacist hatred. The sad reality is that, according to Rankine (2016, 147), Americans "live in a country where [they] assimilate corpses in their daily comings and goings," a country in which "[d]ead blacks are part of normal life."

This fatal trend does not even spare minors and the numbers of black youths murdered at the hands of police authorities and racist vigilantes are painful to count. Amir Brooks (1997 - 2014), Christopher McKay (1996 - 2014), Tamir Rice (2002 - 2014), Darius Simmons (1998 - 2012), Aiyana Stanley-Jones (2002 - 2010) and Cameron Tillman (2000 - 2014) are some of those children and teenagers who were murdered by an actual bullet of the state.[5] Amongst them, the assassination of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin by white vigilante George Zimmerman in 2012 was a turning point in recent US history for it can be considered the catalyst of the Black Lives Matter era. After the news of the murder spread across the country, masses of black voices caused social media to collapse with their outrage and laid the seeds for the birth of the movement with the hashtag which would eventually give it its name: #BlackLivesMatter. Radical black organizers Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi were the masterminds of the project, which channeled the outrage of the black community into this contemporary form of social activism. Black Lives Matter constitutes a modern association which challenges the long-established institutions of white supremacy as a (virtually) omnipresent phenomenon which relies on social media and, therefore, cannot be stopped with traditional forms of state repression. This model responds to what Isabel Wilkerson (2016, 61) describes as "a second [n]adir" of violence for "[i]t seems that the rate of police killings now surpasses the rate of lynchings during the worst decades of the Jim Crow era." Past and present, indeed, seem to now coalesce since the Trayvon Martin case has raised the race question in the United States just as the Emmett Till lynching had done fifty seven years before.

3. Tearing Down the Pillars of the Jim Crow South

More than a century ago, the southern way of life had resisted the Civil War and an incomplete Reconstruction to then be perpetuated by a new caste system anchored in the racial, class, and gendered pillars of the Old South. The

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5   In 2017, the case of fifteen-year-old John Edwards resulted in the sentencing to 15 years in prison of the Dallas police officer who murdered the African American teenager on the same day that, sixty-three years before, Emmett Till had been fatally lynched by southern white supremacists. As Kurtis Lee wrote in the *LA Times*, this sentence meant "a rare victory for civil rights activists seeking justice for the dozens of unarmed African American men and boys who have been killed by police officers in recent years" (2018).

segregation of public and private life created a social scenario which relegated African Americans to the bottom of US society. Their second-class citizenship was not accounted for by their economic possibilities but rather it was completely dependent on and molded by racial bias. White elites succeeded in frustrating the timid attempts of the southern working class to come together to protest against their common precarious economic conditions, and polluted the mind of the average white southerner with racial hatred in order to sustain the white supremacist status quo. By ostracizing African Americans into second-class citizenship, the poorest of whites always felt superior to the richest of blacks and, thus, the southern white elites prevented any possible interracial alliance against their supremacist rule. Among the countless segregated spaces of southern life, rail transportation offered a clear illustration of the contradictory tensions between race and class status with regard to, as Grace Elizabeth Hale (1998, 132) puts it, "how inferior facilities and service worked to ease white anxiety about better-off blacks." When traveling in or across the Jim Crow South, African Americans were automatically relegated to the worst passenger cars and even mandated to wait until the last white passengers bought their tickets, which often denied black people access to the train if the seats were sold out by whites and there was no fully segregated car available to them. W.E.B. Dubois (1921, 230) described this schizophrenic reality in his 1921 study of African American life in the country, *Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil*, wherein he concludes that "[t]here is not in the world a more disgraceful denial of human brotherhood than the 'Jim-Crow' car of the southern United States."

The intersections of the racial and class pillars cemented the foundations of the southern way of life, but both revolved around the oldest of the three: the gendered pillar. The increasing anxieties of the white supremacist patriarchy put into motion the southern myth-making machine and produced a set of hegemonic mythical narratives which, to a certain extent, still permeate the US collective imaginary nowadays.[6] Myths such as the purity of white womanhood, the black mammy, the black whore and the black beast rapist sprung up in the early days of the Jim Crow era, and culminated in sex being established, as sociologist Gunnar Myrdal notes, as "the principle around which the whole structure of segregation ... [was] organized" (quoted in McGuire 2010, vii). The sexual frustrations of the male white southerner pedestaled the conception of

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6   In June 2015, the myth of the protection of white womanhood was invoked by white supremacist and mass murderer Dylann Roof before opening fire at the Charleston Church shooting after complaining that "[African Americans] are raping our women and taking over the country" (Blow 2015).

the white lady to the point where the so-called *southern belle* was perceived as a quasi-goddess-like creature. She became the emblem of the South—according to W.J. Cash's seminal work *The Mind of the South*, "her identification with the very notion of the South itself" (1991, 116)—and her purity was to be protected at all costs and by any means. As Senator Coleman Blease, a fervent advocate of lynching at the time, roared to a crowd of supporters in 1930: "[w]henever the Constitution [of the United States] comes between me and the virtue of the white women of the South, I say to hell with the Constitution!" (quoted in Cash 1991, 248). When the loophole of the Constitution was not enough to repress the liberties of the African American community, this warrior-like mentality took over the South and guaranteed the perpetuation of white supremacy under the rule of Jim Crow.

Among the various sections of the South, this set of hegemonic mythical narratives was harbored and championed with greater fervor within the boundaries of Mississippi. The Magnolia State epitomized the white supremacist patriarchy at its "best" and was proudly considered, as historian James C. Cobb (1992, vii) states, "the most southern place on earth." Its strong idealization of a glorious regional past together with its blatant economic and racial disparities created a stagnant social atmosphere in which the white supremacist hate discourse seemed to not have opposition. James Baldwin witnessed with his own eyes this hostile climate on his first trip to the Deep South in 1957 and, still shocked about what he had seen, he meditated on his southern experience fifteen years later as follows:

> I doubt that I really knew much about terror before I went South. I do not mean, merely, though I very well might, that visceral reaction produced by the realization that one is facing one's own death. Then, as now, a Northern policeman, black or white, a white co-worker, or a black one, the colorless walls of precinct basements, the colorless handcuffs, the colorless future, are quite enough to introduce into one's life the stunning realization that life can be ended at any moment. (Baldwin 1998, 388)

Baldwin's account was an eloquent depiction of the fragility of black life under the southern white supremacist rule. During the Jim Crow era, the merest transgression of the constricted southern etiquette could mean the death of black people and this palpable hostility left a profound traumatic impression on the author who comments in his essay (386): "I felt as though I had wandered into hell." Within this *infernal* scenario, the southern way of life remained almost intact throughout the twentieth century until the resilient African American resistance started to bring some victories in the civil rights arena.

3.1. The Empowering Role of the Emmett Till Narrative in Civil Rights Activism

During the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, an African American tide of social activism was steadily bringing into being the foundations of what would soon become the Civil Rights Movement. Fearsome of the winds of change, the southern white supremacist engine was put into full motion for the preservation of its status quo at the same time as its authorities launched a repressive and violent campaign against black people. The traditional hegemony of the southern way of life was being severely threatened for the first time since the US Civil War and white supremacy was ready and willing to reveal its crudest face. In this unstable climate, the decision of the United States Supreme Court to declare the practice of separate public schools for black and white students unconstitutional on May 17, 1954 (i.e. *Brown v. Board of Education*) dealt an egalitarian blow to the racist apparatus. White southerners were witnessing how the traditional pillars of the region were in danger and, enraged by the prospect of them crumbling, their constant state of paranoia and alertness increased dramatically. On August 28, 1955, Emmett Till was brutally lynched in the Mississippi Delta and, from that moment onwards, the history of race relations in the country was never to be the same.

The gruesome lynching of this fourteen-year-old African American boy greatly spurred on the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement which, as the majority of historians agree, would crystalize with Rosa Parks' courageous defiance to the white supremacist status quo. A hundred days after Till's lynching, Parks refused to yield her seat to a white passenger on a city bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and was subsequently arrested for breaking a segregation ordinance. Being an NAACP official, Parks had attended a community meeting four days before her historical act where Dr. T.R.M. Howard, a prominent civil rights leader from Mississippi who had assisted Till's relatives during the trial, commented at length on the intricacies of the infamous case. Although Parks was already well acquainted with it from the news, Dr. Howard's detailed description of the tragic story seemed to particularly resonate that day, as David L. Jordan (2014, 18) recounts in his memoir, "I remember engaging in a conversation with Rosa Parks and hearing from her own mouth that the death of Emmett Till is what triggered her refusal to give up her seat to a white man."[7] The Montgomery Bus Boycott of December of 1955 started just four days after Parks' arrest and constituted the first large-scale demonstration against segregation in the country. Among the leaders of the boycott was a young African American pastor called Martin

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7   In her 2003 memoir, Mamie Till-Mobley (2003, 257) also narrates how, after they became
     close friends, "Rosa Parks would tell me how she felt about Emmett, how she had thought
     about him on that fateful day when she took that historic stand by keeping her seat."

Luther King Jr., who would soon become a distinguished leader of the Civil Rights Movement. At the beginning of his extraordinary ascent into the annals of history, King already understood the intrinsic martyrdom that the movement would bestow upon some African Americans like Till or himself since, as he prophesied in his first book, *Stride Toward Freedom*, published in 1958: "Today it is Emmett Till, tomorrow it is Martin Luther King. Then in another tomorrow it will be somebody else" (1958, 156).

While the fight for civil rights intensified across the country, the overwhelming Till narrative was playing a deeply influential role for a whole generation of black activists. Constante González Groba (2018, 180) posits how a large number of them, "particularly those who came of age during the 1950s and 1960s, frequently refer to the murder of Till as a crucial point in their racial and political consciousness." The case of famous Mississippi civil rights activist Anne Moody instantiates the profound impact that Till's lynching had on a large number of eventual activists, who historian John Dittmer describe as "the Emmett Till generation" (1994, 58). In her autobiography *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, Anne Moody explains the harsh revelation that she experienced after learning about the gruesome event when she was just fourteen years of age:

> Before Emmett Till's murder, I had known the fear of hunger, hell, and the Devil. But now there was a new fear known to me—the fear of being killed just because I was black. This was the worst of my fears. I knew once I got food, the fear of starving to death would leave. I also was told that if I were a good girl, I wouldn't have to fear the Devil or hell. I didn't know what one had to do or not do as a Negro not to be killed. Probably just being a Negro period was enough, I thought. (2004, 132)

The Till case ended up constituting a collective trauma which has been haunting the African American sociocultural imaginary for decades and, as Moody's experience attests, it also contributed to fueling civil rights activism nationwide. Reverend Jesse Jackson (2003, xii) even came to identify the infamous lynching as the foundational moment of the Civil Rights Movement: "One could make the case that Emmett Till was 'the big bang,' the Tallahatchie River was 'the big bang' of the civil rights movement;" but, although his statement may be excessive, it is undeniable that the Till case acted as a catalyst in the burgeoning tide of civil rights activism which sprang up during the 1950s and extended through the 1960s.

The traumatizing visual component of the Till case proved decisive in the underpinning of his empowering narrative among the African American community. After the gruesome murder of her only son in the South and the disgraceful acquittal of the boy's murderers, Mamie Till set out on a quest

for justice which would span the rest of her life. She successfully fought the southern authorities, who wanted to rapidly bury the black teenager in southern soil, to bring Till's body back North and, as she stated herself, endured the pain of a massive open-casket funeral in Chicago to "[l]et the people see what they did to my boy" (Gorn 2018, 59); and the world did indeed see it. David Jackson captured the otherworldly state of Till's body in a historical photograph which spread like wildfire across the country, igniting the consciousness of thousands of young African Americans. As González Groba (2018, 179) remarks, "[t]he horrific picture of Till's disfigured body published in the September 15, 1955 issue of *Jet* magazine was emblazoned on the minds of many young blacks who, upon seeing it, thought that one day they would avenge his death." The blatant lack of justice seen in the Till case along with the inhuman nature of the crime constituted the last straw for many African Americans who soon decided to stand up and organize themselves to fight for their rights, while, as Clenora Hudson-Weems (2006, xliii) asserts, "[t]he Till case exemplified one of the most dynamic forces of its time." Till's tragic story thus raised a liberating storm across the country which converged with the African American activism of the 1940s and early 1950s to eventually galvanize the Civil Rights Movement. Despite the insidious attempts of southern white supremacy to obscure his story, Myisha Priest (2010, 1) reflects on how the figure of Emmett Till "rises before us again and again": it rose first from the silent depths of the Tallahatchie River, then again in his open-casket funeral before the horrified eyes of the vast majority of the country and, as Priest (2010, 1) remarks, "it rose once more still later when the civil rights movement raised Till's body like a banner."

4. Conclusion

In the year of the sixty-fifth anniversary of his death, Emmett Till still permeates a contemporary US society which, in spite of the COVID-19 crisis and the ensuing national lockdown, continues to struggle with the brutalization of black lives on an almost daily basis. Amid the restrictive times of the pandemic, George Floyd, a forty-six-year-old African American man, was murdered on May 25, 2020 by a Minneapolis police officer who asphyxiated him after applying an excessive chokehold to restrain him while, as viral cellphone video clips show, Floyd remained lying face down on the pavement with his hands cuffed behind his back during the arrest. This new act of police brutality exerted on an African American has raised heated protests in Minneapolis and other parts of the country as a collective reaction to the searing vulnerability of black lives in the US. Floyd's death is one act along an ill-fated thread which connects 2020

cases like the murder of Breonna Taylor, a twenty-six-year-old black woman fatally shot at her house by Louisville police officers during a no-warrant search in March, and Ahmaud Arbery, a twenty-five-year-old black man gunned down while jogging by armed white South Georgia residents in February, to the rest of the past black victims murdered at the hands of abusive police authorities or white supremacist vigilantes. As Cal State LA student Jaime Carter told the *LA Times* during the demonstration about Floyd's death on May 28, 2020 in Los Angeles, California, "he [had come] to protest not only the death of Floyd but of many black men and children who died an unjust death. 'It's Emmett Till, it's LaQuan McDonald,' he said. 'It's every one of them'" (Winton and Ormseth 2020).[8] More than half a decade ago, Emmett Till's powerful narrative contributed to propelling the Civil Rights Movement into existence and tearing down the tyrannical rule of Jim Crow in the South and, despite the passage of time, his memory has continued to reverberate through various social movements to spread the empowering message that, as the chant of an increasing majority resonates, *Black Lives Matter*.

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8   LaQuan McDonald was the seventeen-year-old African American shot dead by a white Chicago police officer on October 20, 2014.

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Chaos in the Ivory Tower: Postcolonial Representations of the Nigerian Academic Elite in Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road* and Ojo Rasaki Bakare's *Once Upon a Tower*

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Abstract

This work explores Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road* (2009) and Ojo Rasaki Bakare's *Once Upon a Tower* (2000) with a view to examining the manner in which Irobi and Bakare represent the Nigerian academic elite in the chaos that hobbles Nigerian public universities and the country in general. Through Louis Althusser's idea of Ideological State Apparatuses, the work analyses how the two playwrights deploy character, setting and other dramatic elements to capture ways in which the Nigerian academic elite, especially those in Nigerian public universities, promote disorder in the polity. The two plays show that some members of the Nigerian academic elite are involved in using undemocratic methods for personal gains and to create anomie in universities and in Nigerian society at large. The work reveals that the academic elite, as represented in the two plays, are not different from the corrupt Nigerian political elite because both are preoccupied with violent and corrupt acts, thereby undermining peace, stability and development in the country. It contends that the two playwrights' representations of the Nigerian academic elite are important not only because they challenge the assumed binary opposition between the Nigerian ruling elite and the Nigerian academic elite, but also because they illuminate the complexity of the recurring chaos in Nigerian universities and the country in general. Consequently, the playwrights invite the Nigerian academic elite to engage in critical self-interrogation, genuine scholarly and community-based activities that are geared towards real national development.

Keywords: Academic Elite; Political Elite; Chaos; Ivory Towers; Postcolonial Africa/Nigeria

1. Introduction

In postcolonial Africa, the notion that universities are springs of knowledge is often taken as gospel truth. In a way, this idea suggests that universities and other tertiary institutions are vehicles of modernity and socio-economic transformations. According to Ogundele (2008, 181), "the slogan 'knowledge is power' in reference to the acquisition of colonial education implies that prior to its coming, there was no knowledge at all on the continent, or that whatever passed for it was worse than useless." Ogundele also remarks that: "Even now, a burning candle or touch radiating light out [a symbol of Western education] remains a favourite icon on school and university logos across Anglophone West Africa. These institutions are still explicitly seen as sources of knowledge/light that will banish ignorance/darkness from Africa" (181). Ozumba summarises the purposes of universities when he observes that: "The common reason generally adduced is that the university is established to provide tertiary education, to form an alliance between town and gown, or to produce highclass individuals capable of working at the upper strata of the society. These individuals are considered to be quite intelligent and are believed to know everything about something and something about everything" (2018, 1).

If universities are considered as the citadels of knowledge, the academics who work in them are the 'critical faculties' in the business of knowledge production. In the contemporary world, defined by the knowledge economy, academics are expected to play pivotal roles in the process of national development owing to the nature of their vocation as intellectuals and producers of knowledge. Because they are saddled with the responsibility of proffering solutions to various existential problems in a society through critical enquiry, the members of the academic elite exercise significant power within the socio-political structure. Thus, they are crucial parts of the ruling class. This implies that members of the academic elite are inexorably linked to the political elite.

In spite of this, academics are not politicians in the orthodox sense because their priority, unlike that of politicians, is not to gain power in order to govern the state. Munene (2006, 187) alludes to the difference between the academic elite and politicians when he remarks that: "While politics is the pursuit and effort to retain power to govern, intellectualism is the art of thinking and raising questions as to what is, seems to be and ought to be in a given geographical environment." Hence, academics' loci of power lie in knowledge production, dissemination and application. These involve postulation, disputation, invention and innovation, among others. However, in postcolonial Africa, the academic elite and politicians are collaborators. According to Munene:

> Politics and intellectualism are constant partners that are often antagonistic and sometimes friendly. It is the practitioners of both, the politicians and the intellectuals, who get caught up in between the two ideals and often end up at loggerheads with each other as each camp tries to push through its perceived interests. Both camps are driven by the reason of state or nation or community and do not operate outside the conceptual confines of a given geopolitical entity. African politicians and intellectuals found themselves responding to envisioned interests of geopolitical entities called 'States' that were often struggling to become 'nations' and the struggle was two levels, domestic and international, and sometimes it was a combination of both. (2006, 187)

Munene further explains that during colonialism, "African politicians often doubled as the African intellectuals because anti-colonialism was first and foremost an intellectual engagement. It was the need to destroy the intellectual base of colonialism that produced people who challenge the colonialism" (187). While noting that after independence in the 1960s, a separation emerged between African politicians and the African intellectual when the African intellectuals began to interrogate the colonialist postures of the emerging African political elite, Munene observes that some African intellectuals are still in alliance with the imperialist centre, thereby involving in perpetuating neocolonialism in Africa (200-201).

Nyamnjoh and Jua (2002, 2) also remark that "the story of education in Africa since colonial times is replete with gruesome acts of physical, psychological, political, economic, and above all, cultural violence against Africans determined to assert their humanity, their creativity, and their right to equality and difference." They explain that "autocratic regimes have traditionally drawn from universities and co-opted intellectuals to provide the conceptual noises they have needed to justify their excesses, promote a culture of violence and silence, and foster mediocrity" (3). In effect, Nyamnjoh and Jua thus suggest that some African academics are complicit in promoting autocratic political cultures in the continent.

In the particular case of Nigerian academics in Nigerian public universities, it has been observed that some of them often orchestrate and superintend over disorder within and outside the universities to advance their personal status and those of the political elite. In spite of this, popular accounts among many Nigerian academics have tended towards representing the members of Nigeria's academic elite, especially those in public universities, as victims of the arbitrary rule of the political elite, both military and civilian. Some members of the Nigerian academic elite have also attributed decayed infrastructures, erratic academic calendar, falling academic standard and incessant unrest in Nigerian public universities to the failure of the Nigerian political elite to properly fund the universities. For instance, Fawole (2020) ascribes the perennial problems in Nigerian public universities to the

tyrannical attitude of the Nigerian political class. He contends that "punitive salary stoppage and other strong-arm methods have been the veritable means of addressing industrial disputes and disagreements since the early 1970s." Fawole remarks that "the starvation that comes with it is the potent means for Nigerian governments, military and civilian alike, to deal particularly with protesting university academics. Whenever government policies and actions push the university teachers to strike as the only remaining option, governments characteristically revert to this default setting: salary stoppage!" He further indicts the ruling elite thus:

> The main preoccupation of the ruling class elites is to plunder the national patrimony. And whenever they want their usually disastrous offspring to attend universities, they send them abroad, or to private universities at home to be awarded unearned degrees. I say 'unearned degrees' not necessarily because their children are unwilling to learn, although it is true that many are not, but because in these poorly staffed and ill-equipped, profit-oriented business enterprises called private universities, degrees can actually be purchased without much academic exertion.

Much like Fawole, Omonigho (2020) asserts that "Nigerian lecturers are the least paid in the world." She explains that "our academics are poor, hungry and abandoned in Nigeria. Despite the excess workload, the poor work environment and the poor remuneration, Nigerian academics are required to conduct and publish their researches or perish." Omonigho attributes the predicaments of academics in Nigerian public universities to the failure of successive Nigerian rulers to use their good offices to ameliorate the suffering of the academics and Nigerian workers in general. According to her:

> The most senior academic (professor) in a public university in Nigeria earns a maximum net salary of 400,000 naira a month which is the equivalent of about $1,000. This is for a Professor who has spent so many years in studies and research, has obtained the highest degree, passing knowledge to generations of students. On the other hand, the lowest politician in the country who may not even have a university degree earns as much as 1.5m Naira which is the equivalent of $4,000 per month. They earn this fat salary for doing nothing tangible, go to work at any time while some of them spend most of their tenure on holidays outside the country spending taxpayers' money.

While this work acknowledges the validity of Fawole and Omonigho's ideological perspectives, one gap in their submissions is that they fail to recognise how some academics are involved in exacerbating various crises confronting Nigerian

public universities and the country in general. Apart from the persistent unhealthy rivalries among the members of the academic elite in Nigerian public universities, some are also in alliances with the corrupt members of political elite for selfish interests.

In addition, studies by some social scientists and education administrators such as Olowu and Eroro (1994), Aluede et al. (2005) and Oludayo et al. (2014) have shown that Nigerian universities, both private and public, are encumbered by a perplexing culture of chaos. Such scholars have identified corruption, poor infrastructures, sexual harassment, tyranny and violence as problems militating against Nigerian universities. However, sufficient scholarly attention has not been given to dramatic portrayals of the Nigerian academic elite within this perennial chaos in Nigerian public universities despite the fact that some Nigerian playwrights have continued to interrogate the issue in their plays. Apart from the two plays selected for analyses in this study, Ahmed Yerima's *Kaffir's Last Game* (1998), Alex Asigbo's *Once Upon a School* (2001), Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit* (2002), Tunde Fatunde's *No More Oil Boom* (2006), Esiaba Irobi's *The Other Side of the Mask* (2009), *Hangmen Also Die* (2011), Fidelis Okoro's *Prof Zemzi's Last Rehearsal* (2008) and Gege Baseran's *Konnudrum* (2009) are some of the many Nigerian dramatic texts that have engaged the disorder plaguing Nigerian public universities. These dramatic texts are responses to various crises of governance in contemporary Nigeria and, as such, they are rich sources of data that require critical analyses. Also, interpreting, through them, the maladies ailing the Nigerian polity yields deeper, fresher and multiple perspectives. It is against this background that the current work derives its relevance. It explicates how two Nigerian playwrights, Esiaba Irobi and Ojo Rasaki Bakare, in their respective plays—*Cemetery Road* (2009) and *Once Upon a Tower* (2000)—deploy dramatic devices to portray the involvement of the Nigerian academic elite in the disorder endemic to Nigerian public universities. As our analyses of the characters of the Nigerian academic elite in the two plays will demonstrate, the binary opposition that Fawole and Omonigho create between the Nigerian academic elite and the Nigerian political elite is illusive because the two classes in fact collaborate, and are united by their use of illegitimate methods to perpetuate their positions of power.

2. Louis Althusser's Idea of Ideological State Apparatuses

The notion of State Ideological Apparatuses is useful to the interpretations of chaos and the characters of the Nigerian academic elite as depicted in the plays selected. The concept was first postulated by Louis Althusser (1994), one of the most prominent Marxist philosophers of the twentieth century. Althusser uses it to show the complexity of Karl Marx's analysis of the relations between the economic

base (also known as the infrastructure) and the superstructure. The economic base comprises the forces of production and the relations of production. While the forces of production refer to the materials and instruments of production, the relations of production imply the manner in which the members of a society organise in order to live their lives on these materials and instruments. The superstructure includes political and legal institutions, namely the law, the police, the army, the courts and the government as well as the aspects of ideology or consciousness such as religious, moral, aesthetic, political, philosophical theories and cultural products through which the members of society represent themselves.

While Marx believes that elements of society's superstructure (such as culture, education and arts) are determined, in *the final instance*, by the economic base of the society, he notes that the superstructure is in fact relatively autonomous and is influenced by a multiplicity of other factors. This suggests that even when major changes occur in the economic base, the superstructure can sometimes remain unchanged for a period of time.

Althusser uses Ideological State Apparatuses to show how ideology has always remained more ubiquitous, influential and more "material" than previously acknowledged by Marx. According to Althusser (71), in order to understand how the State functions, it is important to take into account of the distinction between State power and State apparatus. Equally important is another reality that is on the side of the (repressive) State apparatus, which must not be confused with it. Althusser refers to this reality as "Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISAs) (70). Instances of "Ideological State Apparatuses" are religious institutions, educational institutions, family, political parties, trade union, press, radio, television and others (the communications ISA) and literary arts, sports, and films (the cultural ISAs). Althusser further states that "Repressive State Apparatuses" (RSAs)—police, prison, court, army, etc.—function by repression (including physical repression/violence) and, secondarily, through ideology. Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by ideology and, secondarily, through repression (72).

Moreover, while RSAs are more centralised and unified in their service to the ideology of the ruling class, ISAs are less so and are more diverse than RSAs. In spite of this, various forms of ISAs are unified by subscribing to, and reinforcing the ideology of the ruling class. Althusser (72) explains that "if the ISAs 'function' massively and predominantly by ideology, what unifies their diversity is precisely this functioning, in so far as the ideology by which they function is always in fact unified, despite its diversity and its contradictions, *beneath the ruling ideology*, which is the ideology of 'the ruling class.'" He remarks that it is crucial that the ruling class maintains firm control of the ISAs in order to ensure the effectiveness and the stability of the RSAs. He declares that: "To my knowledge, *no class can*

hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses" (72; italics in the original). However, he recognises that ISAs are the sites of power struggles between the ruling class (or their alliances) and the proletariat.

Althusser also notes that, in contemporary capitalist States, what the ruling class has instituted as its most dominant ISA is the educational institution, which has replaced the Church, the previously dominant ISA (75). This implies that, in a capitalist State, all educational institutions can be categorised as Education ISAs. In contemporary Nigeria, however, religious and educational institutions are equally the most dominant ISAs. Despite the fact that words from "the Temple of God" and those from "the Temple of Knowledge" often reinforce the interests of the ruling class, their purveyors are always held in high esteem. In this respect, religious and educational institutions, in contemporary Nigeria, remain the most important ideological tools through which the members of the ruling class control the people.

Following on from this, it is evident that Althusser's idea of ISAs is very relevant to the interpretation of the character of the Nigerian academic elite and the never-ending chaos in Nigerian public universities and in the country in general. As our analysis of the selected plays will demonstrate, Nigerian public universities (specifically the academics who work in them) are the dominant purveyors of the ideology of the ruling class in the country. The binary opposition that Fawole, Omonigho and others draw between the Nigerian political elite and the academic elite in Nigerian public universities can thus be seen as illusive because, not only are the members of academic elite active and self-conscious agents of the political elite but they, like the political elite, are also involved in using various undemocratic means, including dictatorship and corruption to promote neocolonial/capitalist interests within universities and throughout Nigeria as a whole. Hence, the current work contends that the manner of representing the members of the academic elite in Nigerian public universities in a homogeneous term as victims of the tyranny and corruption of the political elite negates postcolonial Nigerian realities where diverse elements of the elite, including the academic elite, often form alliances to advance their hegemonic interests.

3. Chaos and the Postcolonial Portraits of the Nigerian Academic Elite in Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road* and Ojo Rasaki Bakare's *Once Upon A Tower*

Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road* (2009) won the 2010 Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Literary Prize in the drama category. According to Diala (2014, 149), "*Cemetery Road* was a turning point in Irobi's career as a dramatist. Hitherto primarily concerned with the failure and inadequacies of the postcolony […],

in *Cemetery Road*, he [Irobi] began the deployment of postcolonial discourse in his engagement with the travails of the postcolony." Although the play x-rays the negative effects of imperialism in many African nations, it also depicts the internal leadership crises, including military despotism, in Nigeria and how some Nigerian academics contribute to them.

The temporal setting of *Cemetery Road* is post-independence Nigeria, during a period of military dictatorship. The major events in the play take place in Mazeli's residence at 13 Cemetery Road, an unnamed public university campus and the Torture Chambers, all three in Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria. While the Torture Chambers constitute an RSA domain, the unnamed public university campus belongs to the realm of Educational ISA. Through the unnamed public university setting (the realm of Educational ISA) and the academics who work therein, Irobi challenges the claim that the members of Nigerian academic elite in public universities are collective victims of the Nigerian political elite.

In fact, the playwright, just like Althusser, demonstrates that some Nigerian academics in Nigerian public universities are in accord with the Nigerian political elite in the way they perpetrate corruption and other vices. This is illustrated through the character of K.G.B. Madubunjoala, a Professor of Drama and Head of the Department of Theatre Arts. For instance, Professor Madubunjoala is fond of sexually assaulting Mrs. Fatima Akinola, the departmental Secretary, as well as other female staff members and students. He threatens to relieve Mrs. Fatima Akinola of her job should she refuse to concede to his flirtatious requests. This behaviour of Madubunjoala alludes to the idea that females are endangered in Nigerian public universities. Requests for sex in return for good grades by some high-ranking male academics in Nigerian public universities are common phenomena. That Madubunjoala threatens Mrs. Akinola with dismissal from her job further suggests that Nigerian public universities, like the larger Nigerian society, are still being controlled by the tyrannical, patriarchal hegemony.

Professor Madubunjoala also engages in the destruction of the reputation of his fellow colleagues and junior colleagues. "Every evening, in the Senior Common Room, he and the other Senior lecturer nicknamed "When I was at Harvard" pick up any lecturer's reputation and begin to smoke it like a stick of cigarette" (66). Madubunjoala also works as a spy for the military regime and makes Dr. Mazeli Anyanwu's file "disappear" from the departmental office to frustrate Mazeli's hopes of promotion. Madubunjoala, through such actions, not only condemns and frustrates the transformative efforts of Dr. Mazeli, a radical and anti-establishment intellectual; he also orchestrates his arrest by the members of the Nigerian Secret Security Service. Madubunjoala's endorsement of the military dictatorship is borne out of his ambition to secure a ministerial or ambassadorial position in the military government. By helping the military

to unjustly arrest his fellow colleague, Madubunjoala underscores Althusser's view that members of the Educational ISA are agents of the ruling class. Madubunjoala's involvement in Mazeli's unjust arrest, detention and torture shows how some Nigerian academics enable autocracy, corruption, assassination and other forms of atrocities in the polity. Osundare (2012) also highlights the involvement of Nigerian academics in military dictatorships and the destruction of education system in Nigeria:

> The downturn in our educational system began with the military. The military waged a war against the university. People like us were called 'undue radicals' and pursued and persecuted in all kinds of ways. It came to a height in the time of Buhari and Idiagbon, then went low with Babangida who did his own [that is, wage war against the university] in a very indirect way, then accentuated in the time of Abacha, the University was reduced to nonsense and the kind of ministers of education the military used also helped to destroy the universities. Many of these ministers of education were themselves professors, they helped the military destroy the university system.

Furthermore, in contemporary Nigeria, the agents of Educational ISAs enable the destruction not just of local education, but also the arts and culture. They promote Western aesthetics and cultural values to the detriment of the indigenous arts. For instance, Professor Madubunjoala's mantra and alias "When I Was at Oxford" persistently refers to his period in Oxford. He considers Oxford as a standard that Nigerian academia should aspire to emulate. He denigrates Dr. Mazeli's intellectual investment in community theatre by declaring that "this sort of nonsensical farce can never happen at Cambridge or Oxford" (79). He also berates Dr. Mazeli for teaching his students the relationship between politics and theatre. Madubunjoala orders that Mazeli should stop his rehearsal with the students on the grounds that Mazeli is turning teaching into a subversive activity and indoctrinating his students into his revolutionary whims and caprices (77). In this way, Madubunjoala represents those African intellectuals who, according to Femi Osofisan (1999, 5), are ignorant of African indigenous traditions. Osofisan explains that many African intellectuals "swoon—are made to swoon—in ecstatic delight over cultural products of the West" (5). Apart from signifying his support for the military establishment, Madubunjoala's disapproval of Mazeli's community theatre shows his immersion in the cultural products of the West.

Madubunjoala's hostile attitude towards African community theatre and its epistemological formation also raises another important issue. It shows the poverty of vision and the dogmatic transplantation of Western epistemology that characterise knowledge production in universities in Nigeria and other parts

of Africa. While it is true, as Salami has observed, that "colonialism and other earlier European interventions in Nigeria (Africa) destroyed the indigenous mode of knowledge production in the areas of economy, politics, moral, religion and culture" (2009, 137), postcolonial Nigerian intellectuals, like Madubunjoala, with their immersion in, and obsession with, Western paradigms, continue to act as agents of the Global North in order to undermine the indigenous mode of knowledge production. Madubunjoala represents the neoimperialist Nigerian/African scholars who often exhibit a violent intolerance of indigenous epistemology in their obsession with contributing to the global pool of knowledge in a bid to gain global visibility.

Concerning indigenous knowledge and its importance, Irobi advocates a shift from Western and typographical methods of theorising to non-Western methods, which are based on kinaesthetic/phenomenological and iconographic forms (2010). He asserts that African festivals and oral traditions such as *Ijala*, *Gelede*, *Sankofa*, *Oriki* and others contain their performance theories that African scholars need to explore in order to subvert the hegemony of Western theories. By domesticating theory from an African linguistic perspective, Irobi contends, African scholars will be able to force Western and Africanist scholars to study one or two African languages in order to understand the complex artistic ideas and philosophies that undergird the performances, oratures and literatures of African cultures.

However, Madubunjoala's quest for global visibility deepens his alienation and blinds him from gaining a deeper understanding of the peculiarity of his environment and its epistemological needs, which are different from those of the West. Apart from indicating that Madubunjoala and other neoimperialist Nigerian/African scholars are mere intellectual puppets to the dictates of the Western academy, their gullible endorsement of Western epistemology also shows how agents of Educational ISAs serve as enablers of neocolonialism in postcolonial Nigeria. Thus, Western culture is made dominant in Africa through the agents of Educational ISA that Madubunjoala represents.

Madubunjoala's mantra of "When I Was at Oxford", not only indicates the role he plays in perpetuating the dominance of Western culture, it is also a reflection of his deep cultural and psychological confusion. Here is a Nigerian academic in a Nigerian public university who uses Oxford as his standard, yet he is desperate to take an appointment as Ambassador or Minister from a military regime that is hostile to intellectual and cultural development in the country. Unfortunately, Madubunjoala's contemptible attitudes fall short of the "superior" Oxford standards he extols the virtues of.

However, the domain of Educational ISAs (especially Nigerian public universities) is not a simplistic arena for the perpetuation of the ideology of the

ruling class. Not all members of the Nigerian academic elite in public universities are in alliances with the ruling class. In indeed, as noted before, Althusser noted that the Ideological State Apparatuses are sites of power struggles between the ruling class (or their alliances) and the proletariat or their supporters. In *Cemetery Road*, Irobi depicts this reality through the character of Dr. Mazeli who, unlike Madubunjoala, is a radical intellectual. Dr. Mazeli exhibits a certain degree of transformative vision and a better understanding of the crises of governance in the postcolony. Mazeli's discerning analyses, through his community theatre, of the internal and external factors hobbling postcolonial Nigeria and Africa exemplify his commitment to the pragmatic intellectual approach that is needed to address the myriad of challenges in the nation. His altercation with Douglas and Hazel—BBC Correspondents, who can be considered as agents of imperialists, sent to Africa to foment coup and further destabilise the continent—shows that there are still few genuinely patriotic academics in Nigerian public universities.

Similarly, it is because of his effort to use his community theatre to raise his students' awareness and liberate them from the yoke of military dictatorship and their local and Western collaborators—represented by Madubunjoala, Lawani (an officer of the Security Services and agent of CIA and MI6), Douglas and Hazel—that Mazeli is arrested and tortured. He is forcibly injected with lethal substances by Colonel Dogon Burra, alias Pinochet, who has trained in the art of torture in Latin America, the Republic of South Africa and Iraq. Mazeli's arrest and torture by the military regime and his eventual killing by Lawani illustrate how authoritarian governments in the African State and their Western allies conspire to brutally silence "radical" intellectuals.

However, beyond having an altruistic ambition to liberate the nation from military despotism, Mazeli's radicalism is engendered by psychological wounds. His father has been killed by three horsemen during a religious crisis in Kano in 1966, when he was eleven years old (58). This has created a kind of trauma in his psyche. The wound of Mazeli's inability to rescue his father from his assailants is repressed in his unconscious. Hence, Mazeli's attempt to assassinate the military President represents a way of playing out the unresolved trauma of his father's death.

At this juncture, it is worthy introducing Ojo Rasaki Bakare's *Once Upon a Tower* (2000). As is the case for many other Nigerian playwrights, Ojo Rasaki Bakare's drama is a response to the prevailing sociopolitical realities in post-independence Nigeria. Bakare wrote *Once Upon a Tower* (2000) to satirise the involvement of Nigerian academics in the widespread corruption, oppression and violence in the polity. Like Irobi, Bakare's concern is to demonstrate how some high-ranking academics in Nigerian public universities exacerbate various problems confronting Nigerian universities as well as the country in general. Bakare believes that these

academics are agents of neocolonial Nigerian rulers who use power for their personal gains. The premiere of *Once Upon a Tower* was sponsored by the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Uyo, Nigeria. The performances took place in the Department's Studio Theatre on the 15th and 16th January, 2001.

Divided into twelve movements and a prologue, *Once Upon a Tower* is set in Mariapinto University, Nigeriana, a barely veiled allusion to Nigeria. Through the elements of song, flashback and characterisation, the play depicts the unhealthy rivalry, treachery, inter-generational conflicts, prostitution and cultism that are common in Nigerian public universities. At the centre of the play's conflict is Professor Kurumbete Ijakadi, "MBBS, PhD, Life Provost, College of Medicine, Mariapinto University, Nigeriana" (Bakare 2000, 16).

Mariapinto University, Nigeriana, the spatial setting of the play, represents an important arena of Educational ISA. Professor Kurumbete and other senior academics in the university constitute the agents of the ruling class. Trained in a European university, Professor Kurumbete is the first Gynaecology scholar and consultant in Nigeriana. However, instead of using his experience and knowledge for the advancement of medical science in the country, Professor Kurumbete deploys various methods, including blackmail, to undermine the career of his junior colleagues and students. For instance, he engineers Dr. Akitikori's dismissal from the university because he rebuffs Kurumbete's attempt to coerce him to alter the examination result in favour of Miss Julie, Kurumbete's girlfriend. The dismissal of Akitikori on spurious grounds underscores Althusser's idea that ISAs can use coercive methods to perpetuate the ideology of the dominant class. Owing to Dr. Akitikori's academic brilliance and diligence, Professor Kurumbete considers him as a threat to his authority in the field of Gynaecology. He ensures that Dr. Akitikori is dismissed as a result of a fictitious rape charge levelled against him by Miss Julie. In a dialogue with Dr. Ugolo, the Head of Department of Gynaecology, Professor Kurumbete expresses his hatred towards Dr. Akitikori:

Kurumbete: […] How is the troublemaker in your department?

Ugolo: You mean Akitikori?

Kurumbete: Who else?

Ugolo: Em…Prof. between you and me, he is not a troublemaker. Just that he is a downright non-conformist. He is too bold and vocal, can die for justice and never want to be cowed. But the young man knows his job.

Kurumbete: You are only confirming the fact that he is dangerous. When a bold, just-loving non-conformist also has the advantage of intelligence and professional relevance, then he is too dangerous. Look, that boy is dangerous to my future. He is in my area of specialization,

> well-positioned to break my monopoly. He is also dangerous to your future. Brilliant and active, he is a threat to your long stay as the head of department. We have to get him out of the system fast! (30-31)

In the same way as members of the Nigerian political elite, Professor Kurumbete also promotes nepotism, mediocrity and sexual immorality. That he offers Yemi, his stooge and laboratory attendant, admission into the Medical College without the requisite entrance grades is a case in point. Professor Kurumbete also influences Yemi's appointment as a lecturer at the Department of Gynaecology following his graduation so that he would continue to work as a spy for him. By making Yemi a medical lecturer, in spite of his feeble intellect, Professor Kurumbete demonstrates that he does not believe in academic excellence. In addition, his pressuring of Dr. Akitikori to manipulate Miss Julie's exam grades shows his lack of the moral decency.

By collaborating with Ugolo and Julie to blackmail and bring about the dismissal of Akitikori because of his academic brilliance and diligence, Kurumbete shows that he lacks the intellectual capacity and the academic integrity that are needed to promote healthy epistemological rivalries that would enrich medical research in Mariapinto University in particular and in Nigeriana as a whole. Furthermore, his act of stifling his junior colleagues and students in order to maintain his academic monopoly is similar to the manner in which many Nigerian politicians undermine the interest of the masses for their personal hegemonic building. This is clearly captured in his dialogue with Ugolo:

Ugolo: Remember the extra-ordinarily brilliant part 4 student, Omowaye Pedro whose genius we hope Akitikori will help to specially develop. Yemi will definitely not be able to offer the kind of stuff a brain like Omowaye needs to blossom.

Kurumbete: There you go again. Who tells you I even support the idea of a well enriched special training for Omowaye Pedro? That wizard? Even without any special training, he is already competing with part six students. People like him should be intellectually disempowered if we must own the future. And don't call me evil, I see nothing evil in what I am saying. Self-preservation […] is the first human instinct. (32)

Also, Professor Chukuma, the Vice-Chancellor of the university is portrayed as being far from noble, given his active involvement in promoting academic mediocrity. Professor Chukuma is in an alliance with members of the political

class in order to promote their capitalist interest. For example, Professor Chukuma's parochial ambition to secure a second term as the Vice-Chancellor leads him to compromise the future of his students by refusing to protest against the embezzlement by Senator Abdul Rahamon Ikeanabi, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education, of the funds of the university's medical facilities. It is, therefore, not surprising that medical doctors trained in Mariapinto University turn out to be killers instead of the healers that they are expected to be.

Professor Chukuma represents an ideological agent of the ruling class who enables a poor education system for the children of the masses with the aim of sustaining the ideology of the ruling class. For instance, Omowaye Pedro, in spite of his talent, ends up as a half-baked medical doctor because of the wrong instruction that Dr. Yemi, Professor Kurumbete's protégée, has given him when he was a medical student at Mariapinto University. He is also able to carry out "dry practicals" (experiments without facilities) owing to the fact that the funds meant for medical facilities have been misappropriated by Professor Chukuma's ally, the Senator. However, Professor Kurumbete, his stooge, Dr. Yemi, and Senator Ikeanabi do eventually reap the fruits of their violent acts. For example, Pedro administers the wrong dosage of ketamine as anaesthesia to Khadija—his girlfriend and Senator Ikeanabi's only daughter—in the process of terminating her pregnancy. This eventually results in Khadija's death, for which Pedro is arrested, prosecuted and sentenced. However, he breaks out of jail and goes to Mariapinto University where he shoots Professor Kurumbete, Dr. Yemi, and Senator Ikeanabi. Pedro also subjects Professor Chukuma, the Vice Chancellor, to humiliation. He holds him hostage and threatens to shoot him dead. Razor, on Pedro's order, also gives Professor Chukuma a heavy slap.

Although condemnable, Pedro's violent reprisal attacks are a consequence of the corruption and atrocities perpetrated by Professors Kurumbete and Chukuma and their allies, Drs Yemi and Ugolo, Miss Julie and Senator Ikeanabi. Ordinarily, had Professors Kurumbete and Chukuma been genuinely committed to knowledge production and provided the right leadership to their students, Pedro would not have become a killer-doctor and thug. Pedro's anger and violent protest against the university establishment, represented by Professors Kurumbete and Chukuma, and their political ally, Senator Ikeanabi, is an act of "speaking back" to the patriarchal hegemonies within and outside the university. His insalubrious acts illustrate how many poorly educated, unemployed and disillusioned youths in contemporary Nigeria respond to their marginalisation by the capitalist political and academic elite.

As is evident from the elucidations above, Irobi's *Cemetery Road* and Bakare's *Once Upon a Tower* indict the members of the Nigerian academic elite as agents of chaos. The university settings in both plays indicate that the academic elite

in the postcolony cannot be exculpated from the acts of violence within these educational institutions. The repressive and destructive actions of Professor Kurumbete in *Once Upon a Tower* and those of Professor Madubunjoala in *Cemetery Road* illustrate the involvement of university dons in the crises of governance in the country. Professors Kurumbete, Madubunjoala and Chukuma are ideological agents of the political elite who not only support the neocolonial ideology of the political class, but also help to sustain it through their various tyrannical attitudes. This suggests that Nigerian public universities in contemporary Nigeria are no different from the larger Nigerian society where members of the political class use direct and symbolic forms of violence to suppress the ordinary people.

In *Cemetery Road,* Irobi uses Pidgin English, elements of abuse and animal imagery to expose as well as lampoon the corruption of the academic elite, thereby challenging their alleged messianic preoccupation, victimhood and innocence of the perennial chaos in Nigerian public universities and the nation. For instance, although Mrs. Akinola speaks good English, she reports Professor Madubunjoala's tyrannical acts to Dr. Mazeli in Pidgin English. Her dialogue with Mazeli goes thus:

Fatima:	E don happen again. The donkey talk say I go lose my job as the Departmental Secretary.
Mazeli:	(*bristling*) Who?
Fatima:	Who else but the Head of Department, Professor Madubunjoala alias When I Was at Oxford.
Mazeli:	Why?
Fatima:	My brother, na this morning. As I arrive for work, the yeye man call me into him air-conditioned office and tell me to bring your file. I carry the file go givam. Because of him Mike Tyson hands, I stay on the other side of the table like this (*demonstrate with a table*) and push the file to him. But he say make I draw nearer. So I draw nearer. He ask me, 'where is Dr. Anyanwu's curriculum vitae'. I comot the c.v. givam. As I dey show am the peper, na him the yeye man come take him yeye hand put under my skirt and begin to fondle my Southern Hemisphere.
Mazeli:	And what did you do?
Fatima:	(*fiercely*): I slap am for face two times. You hear me so? Two times for him useless face. (Irobi 2009, 64)

The above excerpt, though comical, is more than a mere reportage of Professor Madubunjoala's oppressive acts. By speaking in Pidgin, Mrs. Akinola's is protesting against Professor Madubunjoala's patriarchal sexual assault. That Fatima calls Madubunjoala, an Oxford trained Professor and Head of Department, "The donkey" and "the yeye man" shows her contempt for Madubunjoala. "The donkey"

also signifies that she regards him as a "puppet" to the military establishment. By metaphorically comparing Madubunjoala's hand to that of the American former professional boxer, Mike Tyson, Fatima implies that Madubunjoala is synonymous with violence and rape. This is because Mike Tyson not only reigned as the undisputed world heavyweight champion; he was also convicted of rape in 1992 and sentenced to six years imprisonment. He was later released on parole after serving three years. Thus, Mike Tyson in Fatima's statement evokes the intimidation, ferocity, highhandedness and patriarchal violence that characterise the Nigerian universities, as they do the boxing ring. Also, Fatima's euphemistic reference to her private parts as her "Southern Hemisphere" is expected to make the audience laugh at Madubunjoala's sexual escapade.

Similarly, Bakare, in *Once Upon a Tower*, creatively deploys songs to satirise the treachery, corruption, highhandedness and violence of Professor Kurumbete. Just like Mrs Fatima's reportage above, some of the songs in the play are rendered in Pidgin. Its use is a device for subverting the hegemony of the imperialist culture and their local promoters, Professors Kurumbete and Chukuma, that Standard British English represents. Apart from entertaining the reader, the songs also reveal the psychological confusion that attends the lives of the neocolonialist academic elite in contemporary Nigerian universities. For example, an excerpt from "I love My Provost", one of the songs used in the play, reads:

Chorus:	I love my provost
	I no go lie
	Na inside fear
	He dey sleep and wake
	If you good for brain
	Ego fear your reign
	Na men like chicken dey be in im friend
Solo:	E get one man
	Na baba Kukuru
	Im name na Provost
	Im beards goatee
	If you see am for
	You go answer Ben Johnson
	Because the man E look like demon. (Bakare 2000, 14)

In the first part of the song, Professor Kurumbete's anti-intellectual psyche is revealed and ridiculed. Although considered a leading Professor in the field of Gynaecology in Nigeriana, Kurumbete demonstrates a narcissistic tendency that negates his professorial status. This is evident in his constant fear of, and

hatred for, his junior colleagues who exhibit an intellectual prowess that he lacks. As reflected in the first part of the song, his liking for feeble-minded and unproductive academics further illustrates his mediocrity and unbridled sense of self-entitlement. The second part of the song satirises Kurumbete's physical features. It describes him as a short man ("Baba Kukuru") with a goatee beard. The song also directly compares him with a demon that makes one take to one's heel when one encounters it. This is underscored through an allusion to Ben Johnson, a Jamaican-born Canadian former sprinter, who won two bronze medals at the 1984 Summer Olympics. As used in the song, "You go answer Ben Johnson" means that one would run for escape if one sees Kurumbete because of his demonic sight. These descriptions, coupled with his hollow intellect, suggest that he is an unpleasant and tyrannical academic.

Apart from songs, Bakare also uses names and acronyms of academic titles as satiric devices to portray the Nigerian academic elite's habituation with violence, power and titles. Ijakadi [meaning combat or warfare], which is Kurumbete's surname, reflects his brawny psyche. As depicted in his name, Professor Kurumbete Ijakadi is always eager to resolve disagreements with his junior colleagues through a combative means. Because he lacks the requisite intellectual capability and moral courage to compete with other lecturers, he resorts to blackmail to keep himself in power as the Provost of the College of Medicine. That he orchestrates Akitikori's dismissal from the university on a false allegation of sexual assault underscores this point. Also, the exhibitionistic manner in which he parades his academic titles and position show that he is a vainglorious individual. An excerpt from the stage direction offers this evidence:

> *Light on stage. Professor Kurumbete's office. On his table stands a nametag—*
> *Professor Kurumbete Ijakadi MBBS, Ph.D, Life Provost, College of Medicine,*
> *Mariapinta University.* (2000:16)

Kurumbete inscribes his academic titles and position on the nametag not merely to introduce himself to prospective visitors to his office, but to announce to them that he is the dominant force in the College of Medicine, Mariapinto University. His other intention is to use his proclaimed titles and position to intimidate other academics, especially the junior ones. This suggests further that Kurumbete exhibits what Millon et al (2004, 340) describe as "elitist narcissism". Millon et al explain that: "Elitist narcissists revel in displays of power, the exhibitionism of raw self-assertion may also be focused on intellectual ability or the privilege of accumulated wealth […], they advertise themselves, brag about their achievement (whether substantive or fraudulent), and make everything they have done appear wonderful and impressive" (340). They further note that: "By making excessive

claims about themselves, elitist narcissists expose a great divide between their actual selves and their self-presentation" (340). Just as Madubunjoala deploys his mantra "When I Was at Oxford" to intimidate his colleagues who studied at Nigerian universities and make them feel inferior, Kurumbete publicises his titles and position—"*MBBS, Ph.D, Life Provost*" as a means of asserting his hegemony in the College. In spite of his proclaimed hegemony, Kurumbete is an unproductive academic. He is a travesty of a genuine scholar. Underscoring the harsh reality of academics like Professors Kurumbete, Chukuma and Madubunjoala in Nigerian universities, Osundare (2012) declares:

> The category of people teaching in our universities today, the quality of their education will have to improve. And then our Professors, our Nigerian Professors, and I stress this, our Professors, many of them have stopped reading. Many of them have stopped professing anything. The fashion in Nigeria today is you keep struggling, and struggling, you play all your politics, the day you become Professor, you sit in your chair, so called chair, you sink into it and say "from now on, it is Ija aye, it is Ari ya' no more writing, no more teaching". Many of the Professors farm out their lectures to junior colleagues. And then what do they do? They go all over the place looking for political appointments. Many of our professors are fake professors. Many of them should not move near the walls of a university in an ideal situation.

A number of issues emerge from the foregoing analyses of the two plays. First, the members of the academic elite in public universities are entangled in unhealthy rivalries. Second, some members of academic elite are involved in various form of corruption, sexual assaults, result racketeering, blackmail and other forms of violence, thereby promoting chaos within and outside Nigerian universities. Third, in the public universities, some academics act as ideological agents of the corrupt, tyrannical political elite with the aim of facilitating the subjugation of some "nonconformist" academics who often express dissenting views on the draconian policies of the ruling class. These points, as represented in the two plays, negate the notion that members of Nigeria's academic elite are essentially victims of the ruling/political elite. Rather, they are collaborators in the acts of fomenting chaos within and outside the Nigerian public universities.

4. Conclusion

This work has examined the role of the members of Nigerian academic elite in the chaos in Nigerian public universities and the country in general as represented in Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road* (2009) and Ojo Rasaki Bakare's *Once Upon a Tower*

(2000). Through Louis Althusser's insight of Ideological State Apparatuses, the work has demonstrated the ways in which the members of the Nigerian academic elite, especially those in Nigerian public universities, promote chaos in the polity. The two plays show that some members of the Nigerian academic elite use various autocratic methods to promote their personal gains and create chaos in the universities and Nigeria in general. This work has revealed that the Nigerian academic elite are not different from the Nigerian political elite because both classes are involved in various undemocratic acts that undermine peace, stability and development in the universities and the country.

The two playwrights' unflattering depictions of the Nigerian academic elite are significant because they challenge the assumed difference between the Nigerian ruling elite and the Nigerian academic elite as well as elucidate the complexity of the persistent disorder in Nigerian universities and the country in general. The two playwrights' representations of the Nigerian academic elite call for critical self-interrogations, genuine scholarly and community-based actions that are geared towards authentic national development. Thus, the work has reaffirmed the significance of Nigerian literary drama in the interpretation of various crises in contemporary Nigeria. As noted earlier, apart from the two playwrights whose plays are analysed here, various other Nigerian playwrights have produced plays that interrogate the Nigerian predicaments from diverse ideological and aesthetic perspectives. Further exploration of other plays will not only enrich Nigerian literary criticism, it will also contribute to a more complete and nuanced understanding of Nigerian/African socio-political conditions.

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Shakespeare for Revolution: From Canon to Activism in *V for Vendetta* and *Sons of Anarchy*

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Abstract

Shakespeare's works have long been a place of cultural and political struggles, and continues to be so. Twenty-first century non-canonical fiction is appropriating Shakespeare for activist purposes. The present article will analyze this phenomenon, applying the concept of cultural capital, the theories of cultural materialism, intertextuality, and appropriation in relation to popular culture, in order to study how Shakespeare's plays are being appropriated from more radically progressive positions, and resituated in alternative contexts. Among the plethora of Shakespearean adaptations of the last decades, non-canonical appropriations in particular offer brand new interpretations of previously assumed ideas about Shakespeare's works, popularizing the playwright in unprecedented ambits and culturally diverse social spaces, while giving voice to the marginalized. Thus, through entertainment, non-canonical fiction products such as *V for Vendetta* and *Sons of Anarchy* recycle the Shakespearean legacy from a critical point of view, while using it as a political weapon for cultural activism, helping to make people aware of social inequalities and to inspire them to adopt a critical stance towards them, as free and equal citizens.

Keywords: cultural activism; appropriation; cultural capital; non-canonical; Shakespeare

1. Introduction

Shakespeare's works have long been adopted as the canonical reference of the dominant social elites, but the cultural capital he represents has been under dispute since, at least, the emergence of the countercultural movements of the 1960s. As such, it is necessary to rethink the role Shakespeare plays in activism in current society, as he may help to fight against the menaces that threaten democratic principles, with emerging sociopolitical movements who foster irrational discourses of hate and violence, manipulating information, and repressing cultural expressions. This article will provide evidence of how popular products of non-canonical fiction, mass broadcast through TV and global digital platforms, may appropriate Shakespeare's works from a critical point of view and recycle Shakespeare's cultural capital, applying it as a useful political weapon of cultural activism in order to demonstrate inequalities and contribute to the widespread raising of social awareness.

Some recent projects have revised Shakespeare's legacy from very different perspectives, but they all recognize Shakespeare's revolutionary power for cultural activism. Here, the concept of cultural activism is understood as the creation of cultural products which challenge dominant interpretations of the world, as well as established conventions related to literature, art, and politics, while presenting alternative socio-political proposals to promote social justice or provoke socio-political changes in a society. In this sense, the concept of cultural activism may be applied at different levels, ranging from radical intellectual revisionism on canonical works, to the diffusion of popular products with a political message, and even the promotion of acts of protest.

We also understand Shakespeare as cultural capital in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu, who coined the term in his work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979), that is, as a cultural marker of economic, social and political status which is used to perpetuate that status, but is at the same time fought for by emerging social forces who want to appropriate it, materially or symbolically, in order to legitimate themselves (Bourdieu 1996, 228). The idea of Shakespeare as cultural capital connects directly with the theories of cultural materialism explained by Dollimore and Sinfield in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (1994), which define Shakespeare as a cultural battlefield where opposing social and political forces try to appropriate the playwright's authority to legitimate their own identities and ideologies.

Furthermore, as Lanier argues in his work *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*, "Shakespeare is valuable cultural capital, but it also models how potentially to challenge hierarchies of taste" (2002, 108). Shakespeare's cultural

capital is thus constantly disputed between those who consider the playwright a sacred representative of the highest culture, and those who attack the place conferred to him as being a symbol of inequality. The backdrop to this cultural dichotomy is the existence of opposing political tendencies, either towards the conservative reproduction of Shakespeare's works or towards the production of radical interventions. In *Broadcast your Shakespeare: Continuity and Change Across Media* (2018), Stephen O'Neill considers Shakespeare an ongoing cultural and ideological project since his cultural capital is transformed through popular culture adaptations which contribute to blurring the boundaries between the terms of high- and popular culture, and to redefining the idea of Shakespeare based on openness and difference. This idea fits well with current changing circumstances, taking into account that each time and each context brings their own social struggle to their (different) interpretations of Shakespearean works and uses them as a political weapon, to voice a concrete ideology or make visible a specific vindictive cause.

In this appropriation process, Shakespeare's texts extend beyond their original time period and circumstances while transforming themselves into new cultural products, which range from faithful plays to other creations apparently far-removed from the original, such as *V for Vendetta* and *Sons of Anarchy*. It is precisely these creations that contribute to revising the tenets of Shakespearean representation in the contemporary world in order that they serve the purposes of cultural activism in its quest to raise the social awareness of the audience. Hence, Shakespeare was "deployed as a tool of empire, taught in schools across the world as a means of promoting the English language and the British imperial agenda" (Sanders 2015, 52), although from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, new authors have systematically used popular media, such as TV and cinema, to create more radical versions of the Bard's plays while searching for new audiences.

These new ways of approaching Shakespeare's works not only privilege certain popular media along with some alternative genres, better understood as subcultural, but they also redefine the concept of the Shakespearean, seeing it as something malleable which can be adapted to all kind of settings, thereby increasing its cultural power and also its appeal for activism. The systematic trend of adapting and popularizing Shakespeare's plays by using different formats and points of view, disseminating them through different media and addressing new publics, has been accelerating since the second part of the last century. The critical approach of cultural materialism pays attention to popular cultural forms like television and fiction, considering them just as important as high culture manifestations. It also widens the scope of research to incorporate cultural products often despised or relegated by scholars, but which deserve to be analyzed in depth as they are increasingly influential in contemporary society.

As Dollimore and Sinfield affirm, "culture is made continuously and Shakespeare's text is reconstructed, reappraised, reassigned all the time through diverse institutions in specific contexts" (1994, viii). Consequently, it is necessary to take into account Denise Albanese's considerations in *Extramural Shakespeare* (2010) about the need to reframe the materialist concept of Shakespeare, as the present moment is quite different from the times in which the Bard became synonymous with highbrow culture, and in turn a recalibration of the sociopolitical environment is vital. It currently seems more necessary than ever to apply cultural materialism theories in order to analyze the increasing amount of popular and critical creations which display social or political topics, and that denounce inequality in all its forms.

This article will focus on some recent Hollywood and TV products to analyse successful examples of adapting Shakespeare for the mass public, through reinterpreting his works in a twenty-first-century key in line with current/ contemporary problems and circumstances in order to provide a critical vision from an updated Shakespearean perspective. In these cases, the Shakespearean references are used for activism in that they may help to shape identities and ideologies, both individually and collectively, while adopting more critical positions. The aim of this article is to describe how non-canonical Shakespearean appropriations may help shape ideology while fostering critical thinking and activism in order to readdress inequalities. To this end, this article will analyze how certain elements in Shakespeare's plays have been retaken and reused for political activism in non-canonical versions of Shakespeare's works, using as case studies: Alan Moore's graphic novel *V for Vendetta* and its later film version by The Wachowskis as well as Kurt Sutter's TV series *Sons of Anarchy*.

This conceptual reinterpretation of Shakespeare connects Albanese's claims relating to the elusive and pervasive presence of the playwright in contemporary products with Maurizio Calbi's theories in *Spectral Shakespeares: Media Adaptations in the Twenty-first Century* (2013).This conceptualization of Shakespeare may help to understand the increasingly heterogeneous and fragmentary presence of the Shakespearean legacy in cultural products in the digital media and the global world of the start of the new millennium. Through these new peripheral means of cultural appropriation, Shakespeare can become a political weapon on behalf of those projects which are able to transform his works into texts for activism, applying his dramatic resources to make inequalities visible and help to raise consciousness about them on a wider scale.

In this sense, "[t]o cite a term made popular by the Occupy movement, Shakespeare whether produced or read or cited is a kind of human microphone repeated and repeating, voiced and revoiced, always rippling out to new audiences both global and local" (Garber 2017, 126). Thus, the use of the Shakespearean

legacy in diverse current contexts serves to dignify and amplify any cause which dares to reclaim it. Shakespeare continues to be a constant source of reference and inspiration, able to move the audience and even to mobilize the masses. Garber herself recognizes that "Shakespeare the institution, the idea, the brand, the author and the works can take the lead in trying to bring about much needed changes" (2017, 126), an extremely interesting idea in these confusing times, with the increasing manipulation of information, when it is crucial to have clear ideas and be guided by one's own critical criteria.

Shakespeare's work is constantly modified and his message may be used to reinforce individual ideas or minority groups' identities which fight to gain visibility, and to establish their own rights against their historical social marginalization. In this way, Shakespeare as cultural icon can be considered a political weapon, a resource to facilitate activism for freedom and equality, and he may be appropriated by diverse ideological causes seeking to activate his revolutionary potential. Ryan talks about the "revolutionary universalism" of Shakespeare's plays to articulate "the potential of all human beings to live according to principles of freedom, equality and justice," but that many aspects of this potential are still not being fulfilled today (2015, 9). Albanese, in *Extramural Shakespeare*, agrees that Shakespeare's plays and what he represents still imply a utopian possibility for social improvement and the prospect for a better world.

Furthermore, Ewan Fernie argues that "Shakespeare means freedom and that is why his plays matter, and not just aesthetically but also in terms of the impact they historically have had and can continue to have on personal and political life in the world" (2017, 1). Moreover, he claims that freedom is a supreme Shakespearean value "which has played an important part in the history of culture and which we need to reclaim now" (2). Thus, we might consider that perhaps the true essence of the witty playwright is exactly this revolutionary potential which is latent in all his work and which can be revived for twenty-first-century activism. As Fernie states, Shakespeare entails a struggle for freedom that is "played out time and again in the life and lives, and progressive political movements, which Shakespeare has stimulated or inspired" (7); which suggests that Shakespeare may extend his influence not only in terms of fictional works but also, through them, to people's consciousness, thus inspiring them to act as agents of social change.

2. The Canon and Non-canonical Shakespearean Versions

According to cultural capital theory, the canon is a reflection of the structures of power in force at a given moment. Consequently, non-canonical genres pose a growing alternative way to represent ideas and stories that is different to the accepted standards of representation established by those who define the canon

as a restrictive and elitist vision of cultural elements. For Krupat "the canon […] performs in the sphere of culture the work of legitimating the prevailing social order" (2005, 157), meaning that the socially dominant class imposes its own world view, which monopolizes the most powerful cultural elements. Shakespeare is a perfect example here, as he is one of the most canonical writers to have ever existed. From the beginning of the twenty-first century, non-canonical genres have offered new possibilities for interpreting Shakespeare while challenging the canon, a trend related to the transformation of how cultural products are produced and received through new digital media and global platforms. Even the most radical of those appropriations are in debt to Shakespeare's legacy, and it is precisely those which most seek to set themselves apart from the original which contribute most to expanding his influence, opening up that legacy to new cultural fields and media. In this sense, as a kind of phantasmagorical pervading presence, the Bard is one of the main inspiring elements in the creation of several recent well-known films and TV series, where other cultural influences rebalance the Shakespearean component, as in case studies used here: *V for Vendetta* and *Sons of Anarchy*.

These non-canonical approaches use appropriation and intertextual references as the creative means to transform Shakespeare into a political tool for activism. In this sense, Kristeva's intertextuality, where texts are a permutation of other texts (1984, 36), is a recurring element, and Hutcheon's ideas about the multi-laminated nature of adaptation (2013, 6) apply well to non-canonical fiction products, which also appropriate multiple influences and cultural references of diverse origin. Furthermore, Julia Sanders affirms that "it is usually at the point of infidelity that the most creative acts of adaptation and appropriation take place" (2015, 20); which reinforces the important role of non-canonical Shakespearean versions that take Shakespeare's plays as a peripheral or non-central reference, then mix them with many others and, thus, contribute to give them new meanings.

For Sanders, adaptations tend to make a canonical work more accessible to wider audiences through the use of proximation and updating, with the aim of bringing it closer to new or younger audiences (Sanders 2015, 21). One such case is *Manga Shakespeare* by the independent British publisher SelfMadeHero which, since 2007, has produced a series of *manga* versions that adapt Shakespeare's plays to the conventions of this cool Japanese genre, making it closer to youth tastes. Compared to adaptation, appropriation "adopts a posture of critique, even assault" (Sanders 2015, 4), and it is more radical and more political, not only in its methods of approaching the source, but also in its purpose of revise it. A good example is Neil Gaiman's graphic novel *The Sandman* (1990-1996), which appropriates not only several Shakespeare plays such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest* and *Hamlet*, but also the figure of the playwright as a character, one who appears throughout the saga alongside the main character

Morpheus. If the value of Shakespeare as cultural capital has been growing over time through the multiple adaptations and appropriations of his works, this is in no small part thanks to his mutability. As new less conventional versions have proved, the interpretation of Shakespeare's works is subject to constant revisions which fuel the intellectual debate and enrich their understanding. At the same time, it is obviously true that he is also a symbol of cultural prestige, and represents powerful cultural capital which is used by governments and authorities as much as it is attacked by radical revisionists and iconoclastic authors with a more revolutionary perspective on his work. This is the case of recent non-canonical cultural products from politically more radical approaches that contribute to the reinterpretation of canonical Shakespeare's plays, which also expand them to new and unknown adaptational territories that definitely contribute to their updating from critical criteria.

In her theories about adaptation, Hutcheon affirms that "adaptation, like evolution, is a transgenerational phenomenon" (2013, 32), which seems especially true in Shakespeare's case as his "[s]tories do get retold in different ways in new material and cultural environments" (2013, 32). Although we might consider both adaptations and appropriations as "offspring" or mutations of the original which have morphed to accommodate themselves to new times and new media, we should also take into consideration Calbi's theories about the elusive nature of Shakespeare's texts, which make more diffuse the borders between original and adaptations, while contributing to redefining the concept of Shakespeare as an object of cultural consumption, which is constantly being recycled and reused.

Moreover, with the arrival of the new millennium, the forces related to Shakespeare and his growing mass-market have been affected by the interconnected phenomena of globalization and digitalization, as Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose have recognized (2006, 1-6). Burt introduces the term "glo-cali-zation" to explain the collapsing of the local and the global through film adaptations of Shakespeare which blur or erase distinctions between categories such as high- and low culture, original and copy, pure and hybrid, English and foreign (2006, 15-16). To this end, old cultural symbols related to high culture mix with new symbols that come from popular culture, and both reach almost every part of the planet through digital platforms. Furthermore, the blurring effects of "glo-cali-zation" on assumed cultural dichotomies may enhance its sociopolitical impact on global audiences, as Calbi also recognizes, and consequently the political impact of non-canonical fiction products may be exponential.

Through their digital and global mass media broadcast, Shakespeare contents expand and, thus, "Shakespeare cannot rightly be placed squarely on the side of hegemonic, dominant culture or counter-hegemonic, resistant subculture" (Burt 2006, 16). In other words, currently Shakespeare is being appropriated by

people for their own purposes, beyond his instrumentalization by a specific social class. This offers new possibilities for the reinterpretation and understanding of Shakespeare's plays, especially in terms of the audiovisual formats exhibited on the screens of cinemas, televisions or, and particularly, through new technologies, such as computers, tablets and smartphones connected to the Internet, which transform the broadcast into a global experience shared by millions of people around the world.

In this way, Shakespeare has actually become the object of global poaching and cultural raids, to use terms close to Michel de Certeau's concepts (1984, 165-176), for different purposes and is mixed with other intertextual references. Thus, Shakespeare has turned into a kind of global visual icon and an incredible source of cultural experimentation, which seems to have increased his influence since the final decades of the twentieth century, to judge by the volume of cultural products recently created that are more or less indebted to the dramatist's work. Moreover, popular culture is full of Shakespearian references, probably because adapting Shakespeare's language to the taste of modern audiences can attract a wider public. In this process, Hollywood has been the main mass producer of Shakespearian versions especially from the 1960s onwards, and exemplifies "the cultural osmosis" Sanders refers to in that, very often, adaptations adapt other adaptations (2015, 13). This happened following the success of Wise's *West Side Story* (1961) and Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968), which have become canonical representations that have themselves also been appropriated by new non-canonical transpositions.

In the long tradition of adapting Shakespeare's repertoire to audiovisual format for wider audiences, there are quite canonical attempts such as Branagh's film adaptations such as *Henry V* (1989) and *Hamlet* (1996), which seem to seek continuity with the tenets developed over decades about Shakespeare's representation. Even in more commercial products such as *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993), Branagh's versions seem to rely as much on the cultural capital Shakespeare represents, as on the "specific cultural associations" the Bard has acquired over time, which "include his identification with culture, quality, Britishness, tradition and wisdom" (Shellard & Keenan 2016, 5). Hence, Branagh's revisions, in general, are faithful to the canonical representation of Shakespeare's plays, deploying the most traditional values associated with Shakespeare as key to his adaptations. Branagh's versions, therefore, benefit from the association of his name with Shakespeare's brand, becoming a synonym for traditional high-quality adaptations.

On the other hand, there are more radical creations which may be considered interesting precedents that paved the way for the alternative productions that will be analyzed in depth later as case studies. In the case of *V for Vendetta,* it is interesting to recall Wilcox's *Forbidden Planet* (1956), the sci-fi film version

of *The Tempest* that foresees the threats of technology, as well as the cold technological vision of Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000), which resituates the play in a global corporation, with a profusion of surveillance cameras monitoring everyone's movements. Among the multiple modern Shakespearean versions, some resituate Shakespeare's works in America, as is the case with *Sons of Anarchy,* which has important precursors in the shape of Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996), a successful postmodern film framed in MTV style and set in a fictional seaside city which resembles Miami, where the Capulets and Montagues are rival drug mafia families, and Gus Van Sant's risky personal appropriation of *Henry IV* in *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), which transposes the Shakespearean plot to the genre of the American road movie, telling the adventures of a couple of gay hustlers.

Thanks to projects like these, which defied the dominant view of the Bard's legacy, Shakespeare's plays have been adapted to so many different settings and periods that it has caused their plots and characters to evolve and update, almost constantly, to every new relevant social situation which demands a new Shakespearean perspective. These adaptations and appropriations act as cultural activism that changes the way we see and understand Shakespeare, while transforming him as cultural capital. In the introduction to *Shakespeare/Not Shakespeare*, Desmet, Loper and Casey (2017) argue for a rhizomatic concept of artistic relations, where the Shakespearean binaries are realigned on a continuum which defies the hierarchies of origin and influence that usually affect adaptations and appropriations. Although they recognize that Shakespeare expands both through reproduction and variation; interestingly, those works which use Shakespeare as a point of departure for new intertextual connections, can relate the Shakespearean corpus to almost anything, including power structures and social struggles.

Far from being delimited by his canonical representation, the Bard expands beyond these boundaries through the variation that non-canonical fiction entails, interconnecting Shakespearean references with other equally spectral intertextual meanings. Through such intertextual references, non-canonical Shakespearean appropriations put Shakespeare in contact with other unexpected popular cultural references and apply the Shakespearean legacy to unusual, and often unprecedented, social and political contexts. Thus, non-canonical Shakespearean fiction widens the scope of both the representation and the critical interpretation of Shakespeare's works, while at the same time using them to make visible specific social and political realities with the ultimate aim of raising consciousness among the audience. Once aware, the audience could then help to readdress those situations, or at least adopt a critical stance in order to fight against inequalities.

Non-canonical Shakespearean versions often use Shakespeare's works as peripheral references in conjunction with other alternative cultural resources.

In doing so, the Shakespearean legacy is redefined through the balance that is established with other popular references. Obviously, entertainment products such as Hollywood films or TV series aim at maximizing economical income from box office or advertising earnings, but some also have a political content that they want to be considered. As some popular and successful non-canonical fiction works, such as *V for Vendetta* and *Sons of Anarchy*, have demonstrated, the fact of reaching mass audiences, amplified by global digital platforms, has made it possible to provide viewers with a critical vision on current sociopolitical topics. Wide audiences, in this way, are able to access entertainment products which also give them a political message reinforced by Shakespeare's cultural authority.

In adapting Shakespearean plays for a wider and, particularly, younger audiences, the language is tailored to suit contemporary style and therefore make them more accessible, while maintaining the use of key quotations. For Lanier, this poses some interesting questions of cultural authority, such as, "[I]s the Shakespearian language being preserved so that it can mythologize pop icons, genres, and attitudes? Or is the pop imagery and style designed to lend Shakespearian poetry a hip currency?" (2002, 87). Maybe the answer to both questions is affirmative, as the process of adaptation, or appropriation, affects both sides of the operation. Through these two processes, Shakespeare acquires currency and also renews his cultural capital, while versions which apply Shakespearean mythology to their characters and genres also increase their cultural impact through their appropriation of the cultural authority the playwright represents.

Revisions that update and transform Shakespeare's plays may, for these reasons, be fostered for political motives which appropriate Shakespeare's discourse through quotations and visual references to reinforce critical positions and promote more progressive ideologies. Although Shakespeare's commitment with more progressive politics depends on the aim of the project's creator, and the approach he or she gives to the appropriated contents, Shakespeare's legacy as cultural capital is currently being recycled and reused as a political weapon by non-canonical fiction.

3. Activism Through Non-canonical Shakespearean Fiction: *V for Vendetta* and *Sons of Anarchy*

As a consequence of the expansion of digitalization and globalization, there are some formats which are being privileged, especially young adult popular audiovisual formats and genres, but which also may appeal to adult audiences, such as dystopian film and TV series, which have contributed to opening the way for Shakespeare's narratives to be applied in new contexts. We should, however, take into account that youth culture is both a mediated and a consumptive culture

(Hulbert et al. 2006, 6). Furthermore, as "18 to 34 is the key demographic for almost every media" (Hulbert et al. 2006, 7), in many ways young audiences make a huge contribution to shaping the products and trends launched within the cultural market. In this sense, *V for Vendetta* and *Sons of Anarchy* exemplify how Shakespeare's works may be appropriated for cultural activism. Of all Shakespeare's works, *Hamlet* is possibly one of his most political plays, dealing as it does with a young intellectual prince coping not only with feelings of revenge but also with endemic corruption, facts which lead him to commit regicide in a bid to fix a world "out of joint". Consequently, it can provide sound cultural references to be used for activism, as will be illustrated by the two case studies chosen here. It cannot be forgotten that Hamlet's commitment is double: he pursues vengeance at the same time as freeing the kingdom of Denmark by killing its illegitimate king. In this sense, the mere planning of the murder of the monarch in a play entailed revolutionary ideology in the Elizabethan age. This revolutionary potential has strong connections with recent popular cultural products such as Sons of Anarchy and V for Vendetta, which retake the topics of revenge, justice, and freedom with a strong violent component.

In *'Hamlet' and World Cinema* (2019), Mark Thornton Burnett studies how adaptations of *Hamlet* from the 1960s to the 1980s focused on the working class and the changing industrial landscape, echoing the social changes and the political struggles of the period. Furthermore, Burnett points to the "generational urgencies, as expressed in the worldwide impact of youth movements, which in turn took energy from, and served to further, experimentation in the arts and broader debate about political organization and social moves" (2019, 33). Since then, audiovisual versions of *Hamlet* have voiced generational troubles, together with sociopolitical demands, thanks to the identification of new younger audiences with the various updated reincarnations of the contradictory figure of the Prince of Denmark. According to Fernie, "Shakespeare's plays crystallize a number of different kinds of freedom dramatically" (2017, 2). One of the most important in the Western tradition is the freedom to be oneself, but also the freedom to do what one likes, the freedom to be different, and also the freedom to enter evil (Fernie 4). All these types of freedom are present in Shakespearean plays such as Hamlet, and are inherited by the characters it inspires as his modern reincarnations, such as Jax in Sons of Anarchy and V in V for Vendetta.

V for Vendetta and *Sons of Anarchy* are appropriations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The Shakespearian text is as spectral as the ghost of King Hamlet: it appears only at some specific moments, but its presence is made felt all the time. Notwithstanding his peripheral or spectral presence, thanks to Shakespeare's cultural authority, a masked terrorist and an outlaw biker are transformed into tragic though complex avengers who perform the alter ego of a modern Hamlet

in quite different contexts. Through non-canonical genres, such as dystopian fiction and outlaw bikers subgenre, the Shakespearean background achieves new meanings while reinforcing the discourse of the modern avengers. Both heroes live in a wild, chaotic world, where violence seems to be the only efficient resource to readdress the situation and accomplish the revenge they deem necessary, even if this brings about the fatal end of the doomed avengers.

Alan Moore, writer of the script, and illustrator David Lloyd created *V for Vendetta*, which was first published during the 1980's as a serial comic by the British magazine *Warrior* and then continued by American comic publisher DC, which finally edited it as a complete graphic novel in 2008. The main character, known as V, fights against the fascist authority in a future Britain while symbolically wearing a mask and disguised as Guy Fawkes, the Catholic activist who took part in the Gunpowder Plot to blow up the English Parliament on November 5, 1605. V revives the revolutionary spirit of Fawkes and carries out his failed plans against the corrupt government who have abolished democracy and seek to find and detain him as a terrorist. This radical message was taken further in the film version, with the same title as the graphic novel, by the Wachowski brothers (2005), who are the true creators of the project as they wrote the script and produced the film with the help of a member of their crew, McTeigue. Their masked hero mobilizes citizens to act against the unfair government, marching through the streets with them and thus becoming their accomplice in bringing about an effective revolutionary change, while they become his audience when he finally blows up the Parliament building at the end of the film.

Both the *V for Vendetta* graphic novel and its later film version change the context of reference of Shakespearean works in order to reuse them with new political intentions. The original graphic novel was conceived as a fierce critique of Thatcher's government of the 1980s, represented as a future British authoritarian regime in a post-nuclear London. Shakespearean references are intermingled with diverse cultural quotations, all of them pervaded by an anarchist discourse, later also taken up in the film adaptation. In both cases, through the framework of dystopian fiction, Shakespeare's cites are critically re-contextualized as a dark vision of a society in the near future ruled by a totalitarian government that uses repressive tactics of control against the population, such as the manipulation of news and the extensive use of surveillance camera systems. But in the case of the Wachowskis' film version, despite keeping the setting of London, the new contextualization of Shakespeare is redirected to a projection of America under Bush's Administration at the beginning of the new millennium, showing its abuses of civil rights. Interestingly, the rise to power of the dictator in the Wachowskis' version is due to a pandemic which causes chaos and it is used as an excuse to persuade people to give up their freedoms for their supposed security.

In the graphic novel, V's quotations from *Macbeth* that he uses against the Gunpowder Plot are reinterpreted with a new meaning in a new political context, thus reversing the message to support V. In the film's initial fight scene, instead of the *Macbeth* lines which were in Moore's original comic, the Wachowskis insert a quotation from *Hamlet* (3.1.52-55) in V's speech,: "We are oft to blame in this: 'Tis too much prov'd, that with devotion's visage, and pious action we do sugar o'er the devil himself", to attack the hypocrisy of government and the abuse of citizens. In widening the scope of their quotations beyond those of Moore's graphic novel, the Wachowskis also include interesting additions such as *Sonnet 55*, but addressing it to Guy Fawkes as a promise to preserve his legacy (Friedman 124). With this change of addressee, Shakespeare and Guy Fawkes are aligned in the same cause as V's. These variations imply a large conceptual change that affects the narrative structure of the film, which becomes a modern revenge tragedy, and also transforms the configuration of the main character, masked V, into a classic tragic avenger. In his dramatic appearances, but especially when addressing the bust of Shakespeare in the film version, or the statue of Justice in the original comic, V's soliloquies remind us of those of Hamlet himself. Furthermore, V's eloquence and strange behavior may be easily misunderstood, as too are those of the Prince of Denmark, leading to him being taken for a mad person that gives vent to insane thoughts.

In *V for Vendetta*, both Moore's comic and later the Wachowskis' film appropriate the cultural capital Shakespeare represents, positioning the Bard on the left and consequently making him the ideological and aesthetical supporter of revolution. As a spectral dystopian projection of Hamlet, V defends anarchism as a true ideology which can combine destruction and creation, thus justifying extreme violence as a necessary means through which to improve the current situation. Thus, Moore uses the quotation from *Henry VIII* (1.4. 75), "O Beauty, 'til now I never knew thee", to show how V refuses Justice as an unfaithful companion, in favor of Anarchy. V's commitment resembles Hamlet's determination to achieve not only personal revenge but also a political change at the highest level. Both purposes are strongly connected because the avengers only can take their complete revenge through the death of their offender, who is also the unfair ruler of the country. In this way, the completion of their premeditated vengeance brings about the liberation of the nation. Hamlet and V for Vendetta pose the need to resort to direct action and even violence, as the only possible way to change the status quo. Both main characters plan cautiously their acts to achieve their objectives, and also both of them know that the accomplishment of their master plan will imply their own destruction.

Ott argues that the film of *V for Vendetta* "mobilizes viewers at a visceral level to reject political apathy and to enact a democratic politics of resistance and revolt against any state that would seek to silence dissent" (2010, 40). In this sense, the

film is able to make people think and react by showing their discontent against unfair current situations. Thus, the creation of a masked avenger inspired by the image of Guy Fawkes during Thatcher's mandate was really subversive, but limited in scale to the world of comic, where *V for Vendetta* became a cult graphic novel with an evident political taint. Some decades later, The Wachowskis' film version reached global diffusion thanks to digital platforms. In consequence, their message has become inspiring for many people who have taken part in social movements and political protests around the world, wearing the same Guy Fawkes mask of V.

V's mask has become a revolutionary symbol of the struggle for freedom, and masked demonstrators appeared in the Arab Spring which started in Tunisia and Algeria in 2010 and was followed by uprisings in many other Muslim countries in the following years, as well as in both the Spanish 15-M movement and in the American Occupy Wall Street movement, which began in 2011. In fact, the hacker activist organization Anonymous was the first organized protest group to use V's mask as a corporate image during its actions against the Church of Scientology in 2008. Indeed, Anonymous' appropriation of V's image along with his speech style has transformed him into a pervading presence in its own social media campaigns, including the annual global mobilization known as the Million Mask March which they have been celebrating on the November 5 since 2011, replicating the final scenes of the film version in the real world.

In having Shakespeare and Fawkes as allies, *V for Vendetta* seeks to empower people, compelling them to act and demand their rights. The film version by the Wachowskis and McTeigue is particularly successful in this respect, placing a mirror in front of people and showing them on the screen who they are and what they can do: as citizens they are the true origin of real power, meaning they have the authority to put people into government and also to remove them, and, in particular, to demand changes and even resort to direct action when authorities abuse their conferred power in any sense.

This same mirroring effect of hidden or unperceived realities is also achieved by the recent Fox TV series *Sons of Anarchy* (2008-2014), currently availably globally on the streaming service Netflix. It was created by Kurt Sutter, who was scriptwriter, director and producer of the series, and is an American transposition of *Hamlet* to the non-canonical subgenre of outlaw bikers. In this context, Shakespeare's play is set in a violent Californian motorcycle club inspired by the Hell's Angels, that traffics firearms and drugs. The series gives a critical portrait of pre-Trump American society as a contemporary reflection of the corrupted Elsinore. The spectral presence of *Hamlet*'s plot and characters in the series gives dramatic strength and political depth to the adventures of the bikers, which depict the true reality of a society strongly divided and stratified. This society is transforming as a result of economic crisis and technological changes, which

have increased social differences and given rise to irrational sociopolitical forces tainted with racial prejudice.

As in classic revenge tragedies, in this series revenge is the fuel for action and violence pervades everything. Characters are strong and have violent impulses, female characters as much as the males, a novelty with respect to the original Shakespearean play. All have dangerous secrets to keep, and must confront conspiracies, regrets and struggles for power. The main character is Jax Teller (modern Hamlet), whose father was killed by Clay (Claudius), the club's president, who then married his accomplice in the murder, the widow, and Jax's mother,7 Gemma (Gertrude). Jax discovers the truth through a secret manuscript his father had written before dying in a mysterious accident, and on the basis of this he wants revenge and to take back the presidency of the bike club, with the help of some loyal friends such as Opie (Horatio), and the support of his old high school sweetheart, Tara (Ophelia).

For those aware of the connection between the original Shakespearean play and the TV series, Sutter makes it more evident through the titles of several episodes, which are short quotes from *Hamlet*, such as *"Burnt and Purged Away"*, *"To Be-Act I"*, *"To Be-Act II"*, *"To Thine Own Self"* and *"What a Piece of Work is Man."* Jorge Carrión affirms that intertextuality is a modern obsession, as on many occasions we find in the same titles the very interpretative key to the episodes, and also a reminder that they are the updating of a tradition which is reincarnated in new historical contexts (57). This is the case with *Sons of Anarchy*, where some titles explicitly refer to the fate of Jax, as Hamlet's reincarnation, in his taking on of the corrupt world that surrounds him in the club. The last episode of the series, *"Papa's Goods"*, reinforces the Hamletian connection as it ends with the last quotation taken from a letter Hamlet writes to Ophelia in Act II, scene 2, as a kind of farewell:

> Doubt thou the stars are fire;
> Doubt that the sun doth move;
> Doubt truth to be a liar;
> But never doubt I love. (Shakespeare 115)

The court of Elsinore and its transposition to a wild Californian motorcycle club in the fictional town of Charming, both serve the same purpose of exemplifying the rotten rule of the 'kingdom'. This provides the opportunity to transfer the idea of systemic corruption and violence related to power to the very concept of the American society. In this context, all the relationships depicted in this series are basically ruled by corruption, affecting not only bikers, but also the rest of the cast, which includes policemen, politicians, and businessmen. In a quickly decomposing society, many individuals use violence in a hostile social environment when they

feel menaced, not protected, or even not represented by authorities. *Sons of Anarchy* pays attention to those who form part of a subterranean America, a varied group of minorities who fight for their survival and the maintenance of their own life style. The series uncovers the hidden social and ideological forces which were interacting in American society for a long time, which were waiting to emerge and take up their most radical positions when political circumstances were favorable.

In the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, the sense of abandonment experienced by a large part of American society played a part in the rise of Trump. Many American citizens felt that the previous administrations had not protected them in difficult times. They showed their negative feelings and acted "against a technologically advanced and economically changing America in which they felt they'd been counted out and left behind" (McWilliams, 2016), and Trump capitalized on that discontent, acting in an aggressive way and giving voice to their irritation towards the elites. *Sons of Anarchy* foresees, in this sense, the upcoming advent of right-wing politics in the US, while also denouncing systemic corruption and social marginalization as the basic causes of that radical advent.

The original key elements in *Hamlet* as a revenge tragedy are, in this series, reproduced in the context of a decaying American society. They fit well with the characteristic features of a society habituated to the use of firearms and violence, with emerging supremacist groups encouraged by Trump's discourse and growing racial abuses committed by police officers. The corrupt kingdom of Denmark thus finds its updated replica across the ocean in a society equally corrupted and lost, one which resorts to guns and violence as the only means to support its ideas. *Sons of Anarchy* presents an interesting portrait of US society, giving voice to the silent minorities and giving a platform to the marginalized who are hardly ever taken into consideration in historical, political, and cultural terms. In fact, the American way of life traditionally supported on the ideas of an equal society with equal opportunities, ruled by a fair democratic government, is completely demolished in *Sons of Anarchy*. These same ideals have traditionally formed part of all/most Western democracies, but they are equally threatened in these times by similar emerging radical phenomena. As such, Sutter's series may also contribute to enhancing social awareness as a means of fighting against these menaces.

4. Conclusion

Adaptations and appropriations are concepts taken from intertextuality which pervade all narratives and help to give sense to new creations that nourish popular culture. They usually rely on canonical works such as Shakespeare to take advantage of the cultural capital they represent. In recent decades, canonical versions of the playwright have contributed to reinforcing the canon, while non-

canonical Shakespearean appropriations have assaulted it, opening his works to new political interpretations and placing them in unprecedented contexts. Therefore, although Shakespeare's cultural capital has been monopolized for a long time by the highbrow factions of society, we are now also witnessing increasing examples of its appropriation by popular culture.

This inherent struggle between popular culture creators and highbrow representatives is precisely what gives Shakespeare its true value nowadays. In this sense, Shakespeare's cultural capital is a currency which never depreciates, indeed it will only become increasingly more valuable. The non-canonical trend is transforming the way we understand Shakespeare and is benefiting from the global diffusion provided by digital platforms which broadcast its message to massive audiences, while also breaking down the boundaries between high- and lowbrow. It can therefore be seen that, through entertainment products with a political message such as *V for Vendetta* and *Sons of Anarchy*, non-canonical versions are recycling Shakespeare's legacy as a pervading peripheral or spectral reference for cultural activism.

From the point of view of cultural materialism, we could appraise Shakespeare as a political weapon, given that he could serve the ideological purposes of a variety of quite different causes, depending on the interpretation each one assigns to his works. The two case studies presented here defy the established canon appropriating Shakespeare's cultural authority to empower people as free and equal human beings, exploiting Shakespeare's revolutionary potential to reinforce the adoption of critical positions towards present society. Thus, non-canonical Shakespearean appropriations are not only helping to change the concept of Shakespeare but also making people conscious of current inequalities, giving voice to the marginalized from cultural representations and showing the possibilities to transform our society with cultural activism.

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Mickey B/Macbeth: Bringing Shakespeare to Prisons and Academia via Film Adaptation

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Abstract

This article examines in detail the project that will be carried out in Murcia (Spain) in 2021 involving *Mickey B* (dir. Tom Magill, 2007), a full-length film adaptation of *Macbeth*, filmed and created by the inmates of a high-security prison in Northern Ireland, Her Majesty's Prison Maghaberry. As part of my collaboration with the Educational Shakespeare Company (ESC, now rebranded as esc films), a charity with branches in Northern Ireland and the US, I translated *Mickey B* into Spanish. Through this translation, I intend to introduce esc film's work with socially excluded groups to both marginalized groups themselves and to academia in order to bring into focus the possibilities of community engagement and the necessary interlinks between academia and what happens beyond the academic world. This case study is the first to examine a finished Prison Shakespeare film project (*Mickey B*) outside Northern Ireland. It aims to analyze the process and artistic outcome of the project and to introduce into a Spanish context some of the ideas promoted by the film (the choice of Shakespeare's plays to promote a reparative cultural work or the notion of inmates as victims as well as perpetrators). However, my aim is to go beyond prison Shakespeare, and to explore the numerous possibilities a film adaptation like *Mickey B* could have, not only in a prison context, but also within academia and film theatres. The constant and ongoing interconnections between the different scenarios and agents make this project the first of its kind in Spain.

Keywords: *Mickey B*; *Macbeth*; Prison Shakespeare; film adaptation; social justice; culture as agency.

1 Origins

My first encounter with prison Shakespeare took place in Belfast in November 2008. I was at Queen's University Belfast as a visiting Ph.D. student under the supervision of Prof. Mark Thornton Burnett when I attended a screening of *Mickey B*, an adaptation of *Macbeth* filmed in a maximum security prison (Her Majesty's Prison, Maghaberry) with a group of serving lifers. I still remember that day at Queen's Film Theatre when I was struck by the suicide of Ladyboy (Lady Macbeth's counterpart), impressed by the quality of the adaptation, and literally amazed during the Q & A when I heard the director of the film and of the Educational Shakespeare Company, Tom Magill and the actor playing the role of Duncan (Sam McClean) talk about their experiences and the challenges involved. Back then, I did not even know about the existence of prison Shakespeare projects and how empowering and transformative they can be for prisoners. The screening and the talk clearly had an enduring impact on me. In September 2019, again in Belfast, I met the Artistic Director, Tom Magill, and CEO, Kirsten Kearney, of esc films as I was going to do a secondment with them as part of my Marie Curie Fellowship. This meeting and subsequent meetings were the grounds for the current project.[1]

The project that will be carried out in Murcia (Spain) in 2021 will focus on the analysis of *Mickey B* (dir. Tom Magill, 2007), set in N. Ireland. As part of my collaboration with esc films, I did the subtitle translation for the film. Thanks to the Spanish subtitles, esc film's work with socially excluded groups will be introduced to marginalized groups and academia to highlight the possibilities of community engagement and the necessary interlinks between academia and the wider society. This case study is the first to examine a feature film (*Mickey B*), an example of a Prison Shakespeare project, outside Northern Ireland with the aim of examining the process and artistic outcome of the project and introduce some of the ideas promoted by the film into a Spanish context. The possibilities that lie ahead are worth exploring: theatre and film as cultural agents of change, the choice of Shakespeare for such projects, the effects and changes these projects have on the prisoners, prison staff and the public and their attitudes towards imprisonment. But the film will also be screened and analysed in academic circles, in university lecture theatres and classrooms, since it is a unique Shakespearean adaptation. Bringing *Mickey B* into academia will serve two purposes: the adaptation will be explored from an aesthetic perspective, and it will also encourage and provide a forum for the academic world to engage

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1.   I want to thank Tom Magill and Kirsten Kearney for their constant help and support.

with socially excluded people. It is the aim of the project to foster community engagement and further exchanges between academia and wider society so that a positive social transformation can take place.

1.1 The lack of Prison Shakespeare programmes in Spain

Prison Shakespeare programmes are numerous in countries such as the UK, the US, Australia, India, Ireland and Italy. The phenomenon of Shakespeare being performed by prisoners started in the 1980s and such projects have proliferated since then. The "most celebrated and best-known Prison Shakespeare programme" (Pensalfini, 2016: 22) is *Shakespeare Behind Bars,* which started in 1995, and is running in a considerable number of prisons in the US. Such has been its success that it became the object of study of Amy Scott-Douglass' book *Shakespeare Inside: The Bard Behind Bars* (2007) as well as of Rogerson's award-winning documentary *Shakespeare Behind Bars* (2005).[2] Scott-Douglass' monograph examines one programme in detail, although the author also talked to practitioners of others. However, *Shakespeare Behind Bars* seems to be more focused on the journey of personal development rather than in the final product.

Unlike in all the countries mentioned above, where there are numerous Prison Shakespeare projects, in Spain there is not a single project with the ambition of bringing Shakespeare to prisons. Furthermore, although theatre workshops do take place in all Spanish prisons, the therapeutic benefits resulting from engagement with creativity tend to be left aside. The only exception (though not Shakespeare-focused) is "Teatro Yeses", a theatre company created by Elena Cánovas in 1985.[3] Prison officer Cánovas arrived at "Centro Penitenciario Madrid I Mujeres," a women's prison in Alcalá de Henares, in 1975 and saw the lack of self-esteem shown by the prisoners. She studied Dramatic Arts and started this theatre company with inmates to provide them with an opportunity to undertake a transformative journey. The company has received several awards, has appeared in newspapers, a documentary titled *Yeses* (dir. Miguel Forneiro, 2018) has been made and even a movie called *El Patio de mi cárcel* (dir. Belén Macías, 2008). Yet, despite its success, no other prisons have followed in the footsteps of "Centro Penitenciario I Mujeres," and it remains a *rara avis* in the Spanish system.

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2. Interestingly, the documentary *Shakespeare Behind Bars* does not show that the actors are inmates until halfway through the film, when they return to their cells. They are first human beings, then actors and only finally convicts.
3. "Teatro Yeses" has appeared in numerous articles in newspapers. For example: https://elpais.com/ccaa/2019/03/07/madrid/1551965884_941524.html

According to Rob Pensalfini, "prison Shakespeare programmes have the potential to build a number of capacities in their participants by virtue of the practice of performing Shakespeare's texts" (2016: 6). The benefits and outcomes are well-documented, but my aim here is to go beyond prison Shakespeare, and to explore the numerous possibilities a film adaptation like *Mickey B* could have, not only in a prison context, but also within academia and film theatres. It is worth mentioning that I consider film audiences to be active, rather than passive agents, equally ready to be challenged and shaken. The constant and ongoing interconnections between the different scenarios and agents make this project the first of its kind in Spain, and it becomes a necessary challenge in present-day society.

1.2 Overview of the Company & Film

esc films started twenty years ago, as a branch of the English Shakespeare Company, whose director at the time was Michael Bogdanov. Magill's and ESC's work has been "deeply influenced by Augusto Boal, the Brazilian Nobel Prize nominee, activist and founding father of *Theatre of the Oppressed*" (esc-film. com).[4] The main characteristic of esc films in relation to other Prison Shakespeare projects is that their medium is film, and the heart of their work is therapeutic filmmaking to "help socially-excluded people rebuild their lives" (esc-film.com).[5] After *Mickey B*, ESC developed a new area of therapeutic filmmaking, which also included people who had been involved in crime that have severe and enduring mental health issues, and also people with learning disabilities. Due to these changes and broader perspectives, ESC rebranded as esc films.

Mickey B is esc film's first feature film, made within a maximum-security prison with inmates forming the cast. This modern take on *Macbeth* speaks back to the play. Its media reception was hostile, the press considering it made "film stars out of criminals" (McDevitt, 2009), contained too much swearing and drug references (Magill and Marquis-Muradaz , 2009:110) and "government officials refused to grant permission for public screenings of the film until years after its initial production" (Bretz, 2016: 577). However, it was praised by theatre scholars and prison theatre practitioners, and was even awarded the 2008 Roger Graef Award for Outstanding Achievement in Film. One of *Mickey B*'s distinctive features is that it rejects the confessional narrative that is typical in American prison Shakespeare projects. Unlike projects such as Laura Bates' *Shakespeare Saved my Life: Ten Years in Solitary with the Bard* and Amy Scott-Douglass' *Shakespeare Inside: The Bard Behind*

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4.   See for instance Augusto Boal, 1979, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Urizen.
5.   For therapeutic filmmaking, see their Second Chance for Change programme.

Bars or *Shakespeare Behind Bars* which promote a "religious rhetoric of salvation" (Bretz, 2016: 583), *Mickey B* "situates the actor-inmates within the violence of a broken society" (Bretz, 2016: 583), where prisoners are both victims and criminals, all sides of them as people are explored, and their humanity emerges. At the same time, *Mickey B* also differs from UK-based prison Shakespeare projects, which tend to emphasize the rhetoric of therapeutic rehabilitation. What *Mickey B* does differently is put the stress on the perpetuation of violence (and a critique of such cyclical systemic violence) at a multiplicity of levels, both within the prison system and the larger social and cultural context. If prison Shakespeare does not pay enough attention to the politics of the penal system, this film, in contrast, forces us to engage with it, see its problems and expose its contradictions, mainly via *Mickey B*'s allusions to the brutality perpetrated on inmates and its ending, where governmental forces and prisoners collaborate. Furthermore, it is distinctive from other projects in that it involves a final cultural product, i.e., the first film of its kind, filmed in prison with inmates.

Following Robert Stam's terminology, *Mickey B* is in fact a transformation of the source text because it manipulates thematic concerns, adding, but also cutting. For Stam, in a transformation, texts 'generate other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin' (2000: 66). Linda Hutcheon also emphasizes that an adaptation not only interprets, but also creates something new (2006: 20). *Mickey B* indeed generates a new text, which transforms *Macbeth* at length. It transposes the Scottish court to a Northern Irish prison, where the official authorities are no longer in charge and it is the prisoners who are in control through "the internal organization of prison paramilitary operations" (Wray, 2011: 347). *Mickey B* imagines the three witches as three bookies who trade in tobacco and drugs in Burnam prison, Duncan (Sam McClean) as a drug dealer in charge of Burnam's C Wing, Macbeth as Duncan's right-hand man Mickey B (David Conway) – who is later in charge of C Wing after murdering Duncan with Ladyboy's help, Lady Macbeth as the protagonist's transsexual lover Ladyboy (Jason Thompson) and Malcolm (Gerard Donegan) as Duncan's son. The play's darkness is emphasized through the *mise-en-scène*. Given that the film is set in a prison, most of the shots are interior and are characterized by the lack of natural light. When external shots do appear, they zoom in on metallic structures, walls or even the barking dogs that guard the prison – fostering an even more claustrophobic atmosphere. Visual images of security cameras, locks or keys inevitably hint at constriction. Language in *Mickey B* is full of colloquialisms and is characterized by a Northern Irish register. The film in this way updates Shakespeare for a new audience.

What the adaptation particularly highlights is its locality, for the setting is a (dis)possessed Northern Ireland, and the "Troubles" are a constant presence.

As Ramona Wray notes, there are "references to sectarian geography ("New Lodge" and "Shankill") and football teams ("Rangers" and "Celtic"), while conjurations of politically freighted episodes […] pepper the package" (2011: 352). Interestingly, the line of command from prison to street during the Troubles is only depicted in the one scene filmed outside the prison and its grounds, the murder of Duffer's (Macduff's counterpart) wife and children. Even Ladyboy's suicide is framed locally, as HMP Maghaberry (the prison where *Mickey B* was filmed) has a record of high prisoner suicide rates. Margaret J. Kidnie considers that a transformation–like *Mickey B*–is the "most extreme mode of innovation" (2009: 3), and that endings tend to be modified. *Mickey B*, conforms to this assertion and, as Ramona Wray notes (2011: 359), it is equally localized. *Mickey B* ends with the alliance between prison officers and the inmates–led by Malcolm – to overthrow Mickey B and kill him. Through this ending, the film alludes to one of the most awkward issues that affected the peace process "the extent to which governmental and "terrorist" organizations acted in concert to determine the course of the Troubles" (Wray, 2011: 359). Localizing *Macbeth* to the setting of prison in Northern Ireland during the Troubles is thus one of the principle elements employed in *Mickey B*'s transformation of the source text.

However, despite the locality of *Mickey B*, the film can actually 'travel' well, and my feeling was that a similar project and transformation of the text could be carried out in Murcia. The film, on the whole, erases issues in the source text that inmates would find hard to identify with or which would have been difficult to film. For example, the fact that Macbeth could not be killed by anyone born of woman is simply cut, simplifying the plot. Although a parallel can be drawn between Birnam Wood (the forest that appears in *Macbeth)* and the presence of police officers at the end of the film, fantastic elements, as such, are erased in *Mickey B*. As Shakespeare is no longer regarded as being untouchably on a pedestal, rewriting and updating *Macbeth* becomes essential to keep him relevant to our modern times. *Mickey B* highlights the representation of torment in the figure of Ladyboy, who, with his hallucinations and vomiting, is depicted as an afflicted figure. In this way, *Mickey B* leaves its trace in the field of Prison Shakespeare in its conception of inmates as victims and perpetrators at the same time. It is the transformation of the text and its reparative cultural work which contribute to thinking anew about Shakespeare.

2. My Project

As part of my Marie Curie Fellowship "Shakespeare and Indian Cinematic Traditions" (Project ID 752060), I had to do a secondment in an institution, and I chose the esc films, whose work I was already aware of. The esc films

team and I agreed that a translation of the subtitles of *Mickey B* into Spanish would probably lead to further projects. The translation itself was a challenge. The language of *Mickey B* "is colloquial and rooted in the culture of Belfast prison slang" (Magill in Fischlin, 2014: 167), meaning there were expressions that were extremely difficult to decipher as they were too specific, while some cultural references were also hard to translate. Following the completion of the translation, a reading of the translation by inmates was scheduled for the end of March 2020 at Campos del Río Prison (the main jail in Murcia), but had to be postponed due to the nationwide covid19 lockdown. Hopefully, it will take place in January 2021. The aim of the reading of the subtitles in Spanish is to ensure inmates can identify with them and that the colloquialisms are maintained in Spanish. However, this would not be the first contact the prisoners have with the film. Before the reading *per se*, comments of those involved in the filming at HMP Maghaberry will be collated and talked through with the inmates to demonstrate to them how transformative a process making the film adaptation was for the prisoners involved; it is a journey of personal development which definitely transcends the prison context.

1. I've left the ghosts behind me
2. You given me a light to search my own darkness
3. Doing this I've realised I'm more than my crime[6]

All these comments highlight the idea of creative expression through film being a cathartic and therapeutic process. They show that when inmates are given the necessary cultural tools, agency, trust, confidence and mutual respect, they can transform their negative experiences and opinion of themselves. Given that the *Mickey B* DVD contains two shorter documentaries: 1) Category A *Mickey B*, which focuses on the making of the film and 2) *Growing up with Violence*, which explores the impact of violence on prisoners who grew up during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, it is my intention to translate both so that the local framework of the film can be understood, as well as the challenges the cast had to overcome. The film and the two documentaries in this way, provide a "valuable historical, local, and personal context for reading the film in terms of its resistance to the penal project in Northern Ireland (Bretz, 2016: 577). Organized around a number of sessions, this part of the project will finish with a screening of *Mickey B* followed by a Q&A with its director, Tom Magill, and executive producer, Kirsten Kearney. Through the screening of the film and documentaries and the Q&A, the endless possibilities

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6. These testimonies have been generously provided by Kirsten Kearney and Tom Magill of esc films.

Mickey B offers are displayed, and it would considerably help to reinforce and strengthen the argument for starting a similar prison Shakespeare project in Murcia, the aim of which would be to give agency and an equal cultural and creative voice to one section of the disempowered and voiceless.

"As part of its mission, the ESC (later esc film) operates not only in relation to a reformist agenda but also with the aim of achieving successful aesthetic effects", claims Ramona Wray (2011: 341). Apart from its cathartic and therapeutic values, *Mickey B* is a powerful Shakespearean adaptation that deserves to be analysed as such, for it generates a new understanding of Shakespeare—from the margins, from prison— that acknowledges the reparative cultural work of his plays. The crossing and crisscrossing of various energies are combined in *Mickey B*, the world of the Northern Irish prison with its specific historical and political conditions being intertwined with the high culture associated with Shakespeare. Screenings of *Mickey B* followed by a Q&A will hopefully take place at Filmoteca Francisco Rabal (a movie theatre in Murcia which mainly shows independent cinema) and at the University of Murcia in March 2021. At the Filmoteca, the screening of *Mickey B* could be an independent event or form part of a Prison Shakespeare programme, including the aforementioned documentary *Shakespeare Behind Bars* and the acclaimed *Cesare deve morire* (dir. Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, 2012), in which inmates at a maximum security prison in Rome prepare for a public performance of *Julius Caesar*. At the University of Murcia, three activities will be scheduled: first of all, a screening of the film followed by a Q&A for the whole Faculty, a Q&A with second-year English studies students, and a workshop with MA students. Given that *Macbeth* is studied as part of the second-year Literature course, *Mickey B* will be included as one of its afterlives. After the analysis of the text, an in-depth exploration of the film will be carried out. The differences between the Shakespearean text and the film, the setting of the film in a (dis)possessed Northern Ireland) and its language and violence, among other issues, will be explored. Given the number of suicides at HMP Maghaberry, Lady Macbeth's suicide caused the authorities some concern. In addition, authorities were also worried about portrayals of violence, resulting in the director and main cast deciding to suggest, rather than portray violence. As Magill claims, allowing inmates "to have the opportunity to reflect upon violence and how violence comes about" (Magill in Fischlin, 2014: 193) as well as to understand the impact of violence is extremely useful. For all these reasons, an analysis of *Mickey B* by MA students in the module entitled "De la página a la pantalla: la literatura anglonorteamericana y su adaptación cinematográfica," would be an intriguing exercise. As a result, a workshop for students run by Tom Magill and Kirsten Kearney was also planned as part of the project. Although *Mickey B* will be studied for its aesthetic value in these contexts, engagement with its creative, cathartic and therapeutic values is unavoidable, since all go hand in hand in the film adaptation,

which is ideologically charged. Activism will, in this way, be brought to academia, such that the academic world may (hopefully) be inspired to move beyond its walls to take part in community engagement and transformation.

Although this project will be limited to these three scenarios (prison, film theatre and University), further possibilities and scenarios can be explored by other individuals and/or institutions. An educational pack consisting of six educational keys (each comprising one or two sessions) designed by esc films and focused around the question: *Can prisoners be educational role models for youth at risk?* would be of interest for teachers and students at high schools where violence is the norm. According to Andrew Bretz, through this Shakespearean film adaptation "prisoners are able to connect to their humanity, while the intellectual challenge of Shakespeare's text helps them retain their sanity in an insanely harsh environment" (2016: 583), suggesting that teenagers at risk might readily benefit from this Shakespearean film adaptation. At the same time, the analysis of the film from different perspectives could lead to further projects, such as stage acting workshops or film workshops for prisoners, which would provide confidence, solidarity, cooperation and teamwork. However, what the future holds for this project will mainly depend on funding and collaborating institutions.

3. Why Shakespeare?

Around the world, Prison Shakespeare programmes have attracted much more attention than prison theatre programmes and their benefits are well documented. According to Rob Pensalfini, "bringing the highest-prestige writer into the lowest-prestige setting in society seems to humanize the experience of those that come into contact with it, and develops social and other skills in the participants. The expression of articulate passionate language in a place that usually forbids it, this theatrical transgression, can give voice and agency to the silenced and disenfranchised" (Pensalfini, 2016: 228). In other words, through Shakespeare, inmates can engage their voices, bodies, intellect and emotion. At the same time, Shakespeare can also help articulate controversial and complex political issues that would otherwise remain submerged; "Shakespeare can be used as a pretext to speak the unspeakable" (Pensalfini, 2016: 38). In the case of *Mickey B,* the ESC started as a branch of the English Shakespeare Company, so Shakespeare was the obvious vehicle for the project. Furthermore, Tom Magill came to Shakespeare as a working-class kid in prison for violence:

I was in a YP Centre (a young prisoners' centre) and I had a choice about whether to scrub floors or do education. And I said, "Okay, I'll do the education."

[…] I picked up this little Penguin thing and it was marked differently and I said, "What's this?" and the librarian said, "That's Shakespeare. You won't be able to read Shakespeare" and I said, "Who fucking won't." So I took it away. And it was *Othello* and I read it over the weekend. But it gave me a headache […] but within that text I recognized this character, Iago. And I thought, "I know you […] I recognized […] the jealousy and what's motivating Iago and that's what I understood, because I'd been that jealous and it had landed me in a lot of problems. And I thought, "Whoa you can actually learn about yourself through reading these books." So that's where it started. And I thought, "I'm going to master this" (Magill in Fischlin, 2014: 163).

What separates Magill from other prison Shakespeare practitioners is that he started his journey behind prison doors. And sharing his own story of discovering the power of creativity and the arts in his prison cell led to his own personal transformation. His challenge to people is—if he can do it, so can they. His work is an invitation for people to write a brave new ending. Tom Magill's admiration for Shakespeare combines with his commitment to "the social, political, and cultural situatedness of his production context" (Magill in Fischlin, 2014: 158). As in other Prison Shakespeare programmes, however, the use of Shakespeare became crucial for inmates' independent transformations and exploratory journeys. The company has engaged with other works of Shakespeare, such as *The Tempest, Prospero's Prison* (2018). Given the success of Prison Shakespeare programmes around the world, this project around *Mickey B*, as the first example using the medium of film, will hopefully open the way for similar programmes in Spain.

The choice of Shakespeare, though, equally helps to reach out to the academic world and achieve my aim of bringing these two worlds (academia and prison) closer to each other in order for each to be influenced by the other. Shakespeare's presence at the University of Murcia is quite widespread. He is taught in compulsory modules, in optional subjects and in two modules on the MA in Comparative Literature syllabus. Inevitably, the relations between the classroom and the world will be strengthened through the analysis and application of *Mickey B*.

4. Challenges

This is an extremely ambitious project that will definitely face a great number of challenges. First and foremost, the project may be regarded as falling into the universal discourse of the majority of prison Shakespeare projects, as though locality were not being taken into account, which is far from the case. The specific locality of *Mickey B* with its repeated allusions to the Troubles in Northern Ireland

and the historical and political conditions emphasized in the film will be tackled from different angles, such as providing historical background before watching the film and documentaries. Anyway, the film is simply a starting point from which to explore pressing social issues and to set up similar projects in Spain.

Secondly, there is no independent funding for this project, as it all emerged from my secondment with esc film. The screenings (and room hires), accommodation and flights of the speakers will be paid exclusively from my Marie Curie research budget. The continuation of the project will be determined by its success, and whether institutions are willing to become stakeholders. Thus far, collaborating institutions include prisons, the "Filmoteca" and the University of Murcia. However, due to the overt critique of the penal system in *Mickey B*, local authorities may withhold their support. Via the film, inmates go on an exploratory journey to understand the implications of their actions and crimes. According to Tom Magill and Jennifer Marquis-Muradaz, "taking part in the film enabled non-conforming life-sentence prisoners to act out and understand the implications of their violent crimes" (2009: 113). Duncan's murder makes Mickey B suffer, and he inevitably has to reflect upon violence, and what motivates it; this leads him to reflect upon the violence which he has perpetrated. Moreover, the capacity to suffer equally allows inmates to connect to their humanity and appreciate the criminality of their actions.

5. Conclusion

The proposed work aims to shed light on how a Shakespearean film adaptation can provide rich opportunities for community-oriented projects aiming to address controversial and pressing social issues. Hopefully, the screening of *Mickey B* in prisons in Murcia will pave the way for a similar project so that the same transformation that participants underwent in Northern Ireland thanks to their involvement with the making of *Mickey B* can be experienced by inmates in Murcia. It will demonstrate the power of Shakespeare as a "creative, social and spiritual life force" (Scott-Douglass, 2007: 137) and it is hoped that subsequent therapeutic effects will emerge. This project will also inevitably change the way we think about inmate rehabilitation and institutional reform. It must though be remembered that the artistic component was equally important in the making of *Mickey B*. Indeed, it is the combination of both aspects that makes it such a unique Shakespearean adaptation within the prison context, and which allows for an easier interconnection with academia.

The academic world, then, can easily be engaged and encouraged to take part in these community-oriented projects for the mutual benefit of both parties. The screenings and numerous engagements in Murcia with *Mickey B* will allow

academia to enjoy the benefits of Prison Shakespeare, without leaving aside the artistic component. Thus, while the adaptation will be explored from an aesthetic perspective, it will also engage and persuade the academic world to engage with socially excluded people. This interconnection between academia and society is necessary to bring about social change and transformation. Communication needs to be more fluent and effective so that new perspectives are provided and new possibilities and dialogue are opened up and explored. We have the tools – let's use them!

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English Studies and Literary Education in the Era of Media Manipulation: Context, Perceptions, Feelings and Challenges

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Abstract

This article analyses the components of a method of literary education aimed at strengthening critical awareness. It discusses whether the current academic context is hospitable to a literary education that fights against the over-simplification of our epistemological horizons. The popularisation of a utilitarian version of university study, the neglect of reflective practices and the marginalisation of the usefulness of the discipline of literature within the field of English Studies are some of the realities that we currently face. Within this context, a literary education involving activism can play an important role in promoting resistance against the pandemic of media manipulation we are in the midst of. After having examined the views of a group of students at the University of Jaén (Spain) concerning the importance of studying an English Studies degree in contemporary society, it is clear that such an education needs to be based on emotional aspects, paying special attention to the students' feelings and perceptions. The results of our corpus-based study using Sentiment Analysis techniques evidence the emotional disaffection of students from certain subjects, namely literature, which are specifically aimed at encouraging critical thinking. Thus, one of the future challenges that must be faced is to foster positive emotions in our literature lessons, as they are essential to promote the students' critical awareness and activism.

Keywords: academic activism; corpus linguistics; literary education; manipulation; Sentiment Analysis

1. Introduction: Contemporary Pandemics and Academic Activism

The reflections included in this article revolve around the need to focus on the valuable intersection between knowledge, emotions, ethics and activism within the realm of English Studies and, more specifically, within the domain of literary education. These ideas have been prompted by the results of an interdisciplinary analysis of the perceptions and feelings of a group of students at the University of Jaén (Spain) concerning the value of studying an English Studies degree in the current era of media manipulation. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront, with renewed strength, the existence of a parallel pandemic created by the widespread constellation of fake news and populist discourses. These discourses, disseminated through the media and social networks, flourish in the hospitable realm of a society marked by what Heather K. McRobie has described as a "commodification of reality," which has replaced "our true human needs" with those that "the culture industry has taught [us] to want" (2013, 33).

However, COVID-19 has also widely disseminated the frequently undervalued but extremely necessary reflection on the power of discourses to modify reality and generate, as in the present COVID context, social alarm, fear, sadness, hatred and desperation. The citizenship currently seems to be moved by two parallel desires: finding a vaccine and stopping those manipulating discourses that, through a "legitimacy dynamics that pandemic diseases […] have a tendency to bring forth and accentuate" (Aaltola 2020, 5), generate anxiety and misinformation. At a time of extreme sensitisation, the social realisation that the use of language is not innocent is unmasking discourses as generators of either wonderful or pernicious effects. The rapid democratisation of this unmasking—which, while comprising the core of philological activity, has been largely undervalued in comparison with the social praise of the practicality of technology—is giving us, both as lecturers and researchers, an opportunity to be socially fashionable and contribute to activating culturally healthy processes not only within academia, but also beyond its walls.

In an era marked by the domination of an *instagramian* semantics, being 'fashionable' or 'meaningfully visible' is understood by us academics, who militate against manipulation and impoverishing homogenisation, as being both socially useful and humanistically activist. In what could be described as an opportunity to initiate powerfully "transformational times" (Henseler 2020a, 1), we should start by reviewing the answers to a set of vital questions: What can we do to reverse the pandemic of commodification and, consequently, of manipulation? What are we beyond our specificity, beyond our dual identities (irreconcilable sometimes) as lecturers and scholars? What is our role when teaching within the field of English Studies and when conducting our research within this area? Can we contribute to

configuring this very area as a *locus* of resistance? Is academia a permeable *locus* or an aseptic space, impermeable to social realities and problems? Are we carriers of the disease of impermeability and thus facilitating channels for its spread, which is lethal to perceptions of the social usefulness of the humanities? Are we replicating commodifying patterns concerning the transmission of knowledge when we blindly subject ourselves to the exclusivist 'publish or perish' imperative, to the journal impact factor (JIF) tyranny or when we succumb to what Jeffery Frank has described as "careerism" (2019, 21)? Those of us who advocate permeability believe that it is necessary to open powerfully generative horizons, wider than those sanctioned as valid by academia and its evaluative agencies. Activism—understood in our academic context as the willingness to use our knowledge to ameliorate society by creating, from our diverse microcosms, the conditions under which free-thinking can flourish and 'contaminate' wider non-academic areas—must be considered an essential constituent of our dual identities.

2. The Vulnerable Task: Expansive Horizons versus Hostile Contexts

Being an activist lecturer/scholar within the realm of philology—and, more specifically, of English Studies—implies revitalising a noble humanistic task. Some of its most important defining features are the dignification and democratisation of the practice of omnivorous reflective reading and the valorisation of critical and creative writing, along with the activist willingness to disseminate the knowledge of these different ways of feeling, experiencing and intellectualising life as they are reflected in a wide variety of discourses, such as those represented by literary texts. The plurality of these different ways of understanding reality is accentuated by the importance given to transnational human values and interculturality within the field of English Studies, which make it an especially fruitful *locus* from which to fly beyond the authority of epistemological closure. Likewise, our activist work with literary texts must be guided by an "ethics of [the] expansion" of "the readers' ideological and imaginative horizons," which constitutes "a powerful antidote against totalitarian systems which, in their socio-political materialization, make people feel both depressed and oppressed" (Caballero Aceituno 2017, 251-252).

This task could be deemed extremely vulnerable since it has enemies in every corner of what could be described as a powerfully hostile realm. From an ideological point of view, our activist task must confront the widespread perversion of the idea of 'usefulness,' which is coming to be associated with the practicalities of utilitarianism. As Martha C. Nussbaum (2016) has argued, we are immersed in "a crisis of massive proportions and grave global significance" (1), by virtue of which "thirsty for national profit, nations, and their systems of education, are heedlessly discarding skills that are needed to keep democracies

alive," whilst favouring "the cultivation of the useful and highly applied skills suited to profit-making" (2). By contrast, "abilities crucial to the health of any democracy internally, and to the creation of a decent world culture capable of constructively addressing the world's most pressing problems" (7)—i.e., exactly those that our activist praxis needs to cultivate and revitalise—are being left to one side. These abilities constitute the essential core of the Humanities, a field that, as David Damrosch argues, is currently "under severe strain, buffeted by declining enrollments as STEM fields garner more and more interest from college students and their anxious parents" (2020, 4).

Pressure of work within academia, and also outside it, is not hospitable to the exercise of reflective skills, which must be favoured so as to prompt critical thinking and creativity—creativity being understood as the ability to imagine, generate and validate fresh new solutions to solve contemporary dilemmas and problems. Yet, these skills are succumbing to the irreflexive cult of immediacy, imported from the instantaneous patterns of communication rendered extremely fashionable by new technologies. As Renate Lorenz argues, we are under the tyranny of "chrononormativity," which uses "a whole range of seemingly innocent instruments such as schedules, to-do lists, calendars, deadlines, watches and computers," to favour "maximized productivity" (2014a, 15), which is not compatible with our activist *tempo*. We agree with Jüri Talvet (2005) on the fact that "the curing effects of arts and literature" (11) cannot be instantaneously felt, as they do not "improve life directly, in the material and economic sense. Yet they can definitely contribute to increase society's sensibility" (90). In this respect Christine Henseler advocates "the need for a humanistic turn" which can liberate us from the tyranny of rapid, instantaneous productivity, as we, the humanists, can slowly contribute "to the making of a more inclusive, equitable, caring and kind—yet no less productive and innovative—world community" (2020a, 1).

The curricular spaces available for reflective and activist practices, which are frequently endowed with connotations of (s)low productivity or, more perversely, even of politicization, have also been restricted. Assigning long critical essays to large groups of students may seem suicidal when the requirements are for lecturers to be extremely productive in terms of research output and not to spend too much time on giving valuable feedback to students on their written performance or on expanding their imaginative horizons. The Bologna Process[1],

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1   As stated by the European Commission, the Bologna Process was originally designed "to bring more coherence to higher education systems across Europe. It established the European Higher Education Area to facilitate student and staff mobility, to make higher education more inclusive and accessible, and to make higher education in Europe more attractive and competitive worldwide." Some of its most important aims were to "ensure the mutual recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad completed at other universities"

described by humanists such as Jordi Llovet as truly "neoliberal" (2011, 178), has packaged knowledge into parcels to be delivered quarterly, thus forcing the pace of reflection to be adapted to a reality of almost-impossible-to-fulfill teaching schedules and ruling out the possibility of creating spaces for the thorough observation of and intervention in what happens beyond the classroom.

We have come to generate highly specialised separations where we should be advocating symbiotic conciliations. As Tilley and Taylor (2014) note, in academia "the production and advancement of knowledge are privileged over […] action connected to the everyday work of fighting for individual and community rights," which is "often very distanced from the knowledge producing priorities of universities" (53). These authors further highlight the fact that whereas "scholarly activity is rewarded with tenure and promotion and research monies […] work connected to activist leanings, can be construed as taking time away from or interfering with scholarly endeavors" (54), which in their view has contributed to institutionalising a "false binary" (56) that must be undermined.

Under the weight of all these constraining factors, is it possible to create in our classrooms microcosms that are hospitable to activism, i.e., to meaningful action to increase social welfare? We believe that it is. One of our most important professional contributions should be to encourage the generation of reservoirs of intellectual dynamism among our students and signpost the paths along which these reservoirs can be directed towards positive social change *via* teaching and research. In the present context the design of these routes should be primarily aimed at combating the impoverishing epistemology of intellectual confinement created by media-diffused manipulation. Within the context of English Studies, where literature is still a core subject, can our literature lessons be considered *loci* that are particularly hospitable to this activist praxis? Which principles should literary education follow so as to enhance this hospitality? An activist literary education must revitalise and develop the understanding of literary texts as potentially life-changing productions in both an intellectual and socio-ethical sense. Likewise, it must also translate this inexhaustible potential of the literary text into a meaningful emotional dialogue with students' innerselves. A reflection on the significance of the students' feelings and perceptions when approaching literature and, by extension, when pursuing English Studies, is a meaningful precondition for generating the aforementioned reservoirs of dynamism in the classroom. This is the reason why the modality of Sentiment Analysis has been

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and "implement a system of quality assurance, to strengthen the quality and relevance of learning and teaching" (European Commission. "The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area." *Policies, Education and Training*, https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/higher-education/bologna-process-and-european-higher-education-area_en).

chosen to examine the data that have prompted these reflections and helped us to delineate some future challenges concerning literary education.

3. English Studies, Literature and Students' Feelings and perceptions. The Study

3.1. Participants

Forty-six participants, 70% female and 30% male, took part in this study. The participants were second-year students of the English Studies degree at the University of Jaén (Spain). Although this project was carried out in a Spanish university, not all the participants were from Spain since three Erasmus students also participated: one from Italy and two from the Netherlands.

The interviews we are analysing in this article are part of a teaching innovation project funded by our home university to improve the quality of education. The project is entitled *Generating critical thinking networks: Tools and materials to analyse reality and its discourses* (PIMED09_20192021) and it aims at encouraging students to critically think in a world in which phenomena such as fake news are part of our daily lives. These interviews were part of the final assessment for the Instrumental English 2 module of this degree. The interviewer/examiner was the teacher of the practical part of the module, Yolanda Caballero Aceituno. This part includes the assessment of students' speaking abilities. Although this module forms part of the second-year curriculum, there were also some students who were retaking the module, as well as one who was a freshman[2]. Consequently, the participants' ages ranged from 18 to 23 years old.

3.2. Corpus

The interview, which was done in pairs, consisted of two parts: a prepared part, in which students were asked to describe a person they admire, and a spontaneous part comprising questions related to the topics learned and discussed during the course. The topic of the first part was known to students, who could prepare it at home, and was a monologue presented in front of the teacher. The second part was unrehearsed on the part of students and involved the examiner asking them questions about topics they had covered and reviewed in class. So, although the students knew the topics to be covered, they did not know the exact questions.

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2   It is worth mentioning that, at the University of Jaén, freshmen are able to take modules in addition to those taught in the first year. As there is an Instrumental English 1 subject, some students usually take the second one at the same time.

The examiner asked the questions in such a way that the participants could engage in a dialogue between themselves. Whilst there were various topics involved, in the present article we are focusing on just three of them: manipulation, students' experience of their degree course and their perception of contemporary society.

The interviews were recorded and then automatically transcribed using the webpage Happy Scribe[3]. However, the transcriptions needed to be manually revised to correct for mistakes related to students' pronunciation problems. The corpus consists of 18,534 tokens and 1,135 types.

3.3. *Methodology*

The students were asked a set of different questions revolving around the topics of manipulation, their perceptions about their degree course and their opinions about contemporary society. A compilation of the questions can be seen in table 1.

TABLE 1. Set of questions used in the interviews

Topic	Questions
Manipulation	"Do you think that we are easily manipulated nowadays?"
	"I'd like to know whether you think we live in a society where we are very easily manipulated"
	"Do you think that those students who belong to the area of the Humanities are more critical than other students?"
	"Do you think that people who are studying this English Studies degree are better prepared than others to fight against manipulation?"
	"Do you think that students who decide to take this degree are more difficult to manipulate than students of other degrees?"
	"Do you think that we are trained in this degree to have critical consciousness?"
	"Do you think that it is because you are studying this degree that you are more open-minded than other students?"
	"Do you think we live in a very manipulated society? If so, why?"
Manipulation	"I want to know your opinion about manipulation, do you think we are going through a serious problem?"
	"Do you think that people who study this degree are better prepared than others? Do you think that they are more critical?"

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3   It can be accessed at: https://www.happyscribe.co/es/

Topic	Questions
	"What can you tell me about manipulation nowadays? What is your opinion about manipulation?"
	"I would like you to tell me whether you think we live in a society in which we are very manipulated or not"
	"Do you think that by studying this degree we are more or less easily manipulated than other people?"
	"Do you feel that we are very manipulated nowadays?"
Students' perceptions of their degree course	"What do you think about this degree you are studying? Tell me three reasons why you consider it useful"
	"Do you feel happy about being studying this degree?"
	"I want to know whether you feel happy in this degree and which are the aspects of this degree that you like and the ones you do not like at all"
	"What is your impression about this degree?"
	"I want you to tell me your opinion about your degree"
	"Tell me what you love about this degree and what you do not like at all"
Contemporary society	"In your view, what is the worst thing in this society nowadays?"
	"Tell me a very brief description of society nowadays, how do you see society nowadays? Do you have a positive image or a negative one?"
	"What is your impression about current society?"
	"What about current society? Do you think the society we live in is a good one or a negative one? Do you find more positive or negative aspects in our current society?"
	"How would you describe current society? Would you describe it as a positive or as a negative one?"
	"I am really interested in how you see contemporary society, are you optimistic or pessimistic about the world nowadays?"

For each question the students were asked, they gave their opinion and discussed the topic with their partner. We implemented two types of analysis: the first was based on the interpretation of students' responses and the second was an automatic analysis of students' opinions and perceptions towards the aforementioned topics using a computational program.

Corpus Linguistics was chosen as the methodology for this research because it deals with the study of the language in a corpus. It is worth mentioning that Corpus Linguistics is not a simply quantitative discipline as it also involves the

qualitative interpretation of the data. A study such as that described here generates huge amounts of data, and therefore computation programs are necessary to handle and analyse it. One such computational program is *R*, a high-level programming language and free software environment with a huge community of users who are constantly developing libraries to enrich the analysis of data in various fields, including linguistics (Fradejas Rueda 2019). For example, and of particular interest here, there are lexicons that have been developed to carry out Sentiment Analysis. Liu (2012, 7) explains that Sentiment Analysis deals with the study of people's opinions or attitudes in natural language texts. As in this article we are analysing students' opinions and perceptions towards certain topics, Sentiment Analysis techniques seem eminently suitable. For this reason, we have used two different lexicons: NRC (Mohammad and Turney 2013) and BING (Hu and Liu 2004). The former classifies words according to eight emotions: fear, anger, trust, sadness, disgust, anticipation, joy and surprise, as well as two feelings: positive and negative, whereas the latter simply classifies words as positive or negative.

4. Analysis of the Results

In the subsequent sections, the results will be presented according to the topics addressed in the interview, that is, manipulation and students' perception of their degree and of contemporary society. It is worth mentioning that not all the questions compiled in table 1 were asked to every student.

4.1. Manipulation

According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, *manipulation* means "to control or play upon by artful, unfair, or insidious means especially to one's own advantage." Nowadays, in our current society, the term manipulation is often associated with information and the media. Consequently, the dissemination of *fake news* has become such a normal practice in our current society that, during the coronavirus crisis, the Spanish government felt obliged to create a guide to help citizens avoid being manipulated by fake news[4].

In light of current events and taking into account our project, students were asked whether they thought they lived in a manipulative society. Twenty students were asked this question and all answered in the affirmative. Nevertheless, their interpretation of the term *manipulation* was not always related to information

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4   It can be seen at "La policía presenta la primera guía para evitar ser manipulados por las fake news."

and the media. Indeed, when asked about manipulation, students related this concept to five different aspects:

a) Ten students pointed out the impact that social media, mainly Instagram and the emphasis on physical appearance of influencers[5], can have on them. They also mentioned the fact that some people portray a very different life in their online presence to that which they have in real life.

b) Two students mentioned marketing and advertising campaigns where companies, according to them, try to trick their target audience.

c) One student talked about the fact that politicians promise a lot during their political campaigns but do not deliver once they are elected.

d) Four students made reference to fake news.

e) Three students were worried about biased information. They felt that the media just show us what they want us to see and there is always some vested interest behind each news item.

Figure 1 shows this information graphically:

FIGURE 1. Aspects indicated by students' responses
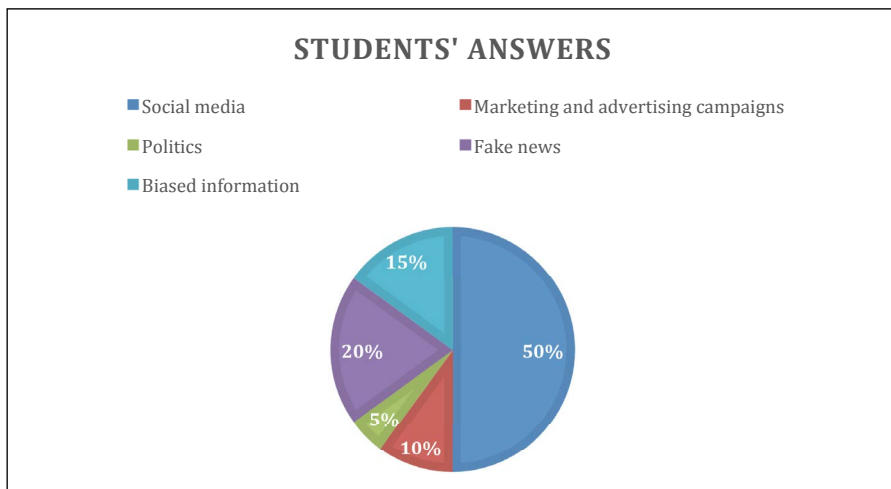
Accordingly, the most frequent words used in their responses were *media* (32), *people* (22) and *manipulated* (21), and the most frequent bigrams—a

5   According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, an influencer is "a person who is able to generate interest in something (such as a consumer product) by posting about it on social media".

combination of two words—were *social media* and *mobile phone*.

Applying the Sentiment Analysis technique to the topic of manipulation, it is not surprising that most of the words related to the topic of manipulation are negative. In fact, the students employed 4,792 words with a negative polarity, and 2,027 positive ones, according to the BING lexicon. Table 2 shows the overall score of the positive and negative words in the corpus of responses to this topic.

TABLE 2. Distribution of negative and positive words according to the BING lexicon in the manipulation topic

| Sentiment	n
Negative	4,792
Positive	2,027

Among the negative words, some of the most frequent were: *manipulation, bad, pretend, manipulate, false* and *fake*. The NRC lexicon also demonstrated that negative feelings were more regularly mentioned than positive ones, the most frequent being negativity, followed by fear and anger, as can be seen in table 3, which shows the quantity of words appearing in the corpus.

TABLE 3. Distribution of words according to NRC lexicon in the manipulation topic

| Sentiment	n
Negative	3,337
Positive	2,355
Fear	1,486
Anger	1,257
Trust	1,250
Sadness	1,196
Disgust	1,061
Anticipation	857
Joy	698
Surprise	536

Words like *manipulation, bad* or *conflict* coincide in these three classifications, as can be seen in figure 2, which shows the frequency of the words belonging to each sentiment.

FIGURE 2. Most frequent words used to describe different types of emotions emotion in relation to manipulation according to NRC lexicon
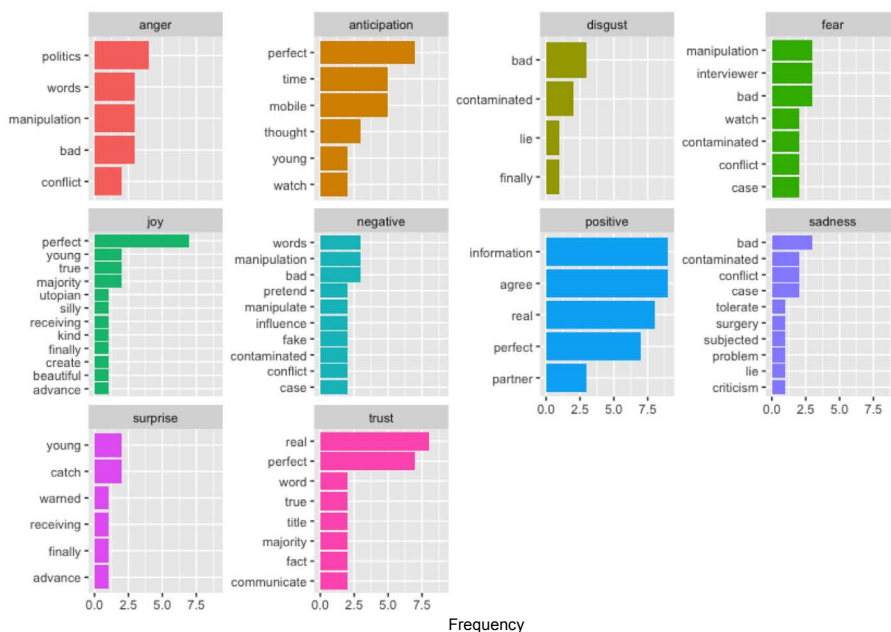
Related to the manipulation questions, students were also asked whether they thought that studying an English Studies degree could help them not to be manipulated or to be manipulated less than students on other degree courses. Seventeen students were asked this question. Their responses can be seen in figure 3:

FIGURE 3. Distribution of students' perceptions of the existence of a relationship between studying an English Studies degree and manipulation
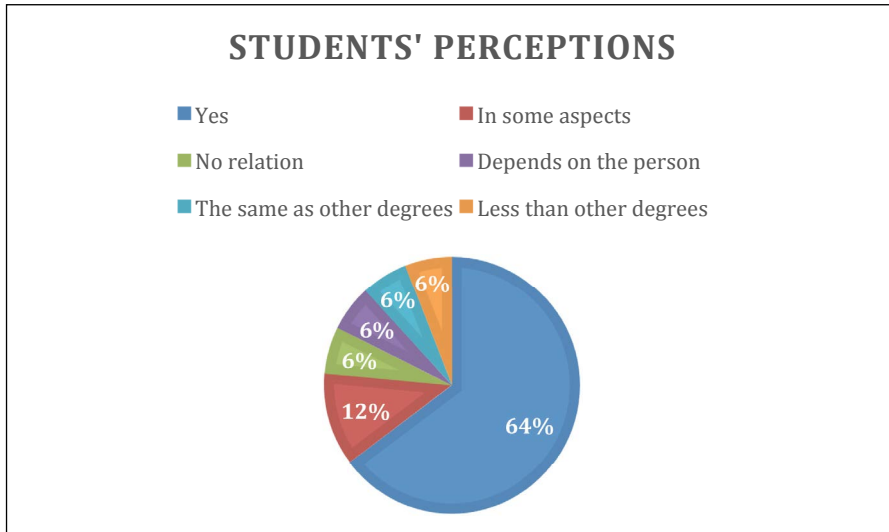
Clearly most students felt that studying an English Studies degree helps them to not be manipulated. However, they gave a wide range of reasons for this. On the one hand, most of them (ten out of eleven who were asked) referred to some specific aspects of the degree. Firstly, three of those ten students explained how, in their view, the degree could contribute to developing critical thinking abilities. Secondly, two students made reference to the fact of speaking more than one language. Thirdly, two others mentioned aspects related to the linguistic part of the degree, such as analysing texts, and two students talked about learning about another culture and how it broadens the mind. Surprisingly, only one student alluded to literature as a beneficial tool to fight against manipulation. In his words—here literally transcribed:

(1) "But I also think literature and culture is like a way of escaping to this manipulation, so in a sense I would say that philologists nowadays are necessary, of course, because they can give an approach to original aspects and to criticism which are lacking nowadays, of course and, you know, when we read, when we read novels or any piece of paper about any historical fact that happened, we are looking at the history of someone else, to his way of thinking and it makes us more tolerate than if we chose to try to go with it, so I think in a sense we are getting

prepared to be more critical, but I also think that it is just not a matter of what we study but a matter related to our way of thinking."

There were, in addition, responses related to other aspects which were made by only one student in each case although we believe that what they said was worthy of comment.

According to one of the students, being manipulated depends on the person receiving the information, specifically mentioning that it relates to the students' capabilities, personality and behaviour. Two mentioned the fact that it is not only studying an English Studies degree that can contribute to raising a person's critical awareness, with one saying that all Humanities degrees develop this skill, while another felt that studying any degree at all helps people to be less manipulated. From a slightly different perspective, one student claimed that studying a science degree is more useful than studying a humanities degree in this respect, one of the reasons given being that such students would not be manipulated in terms of issues such as climate change.

Apart from this, two other students also saw positive connections between studying an English degree and resisting manipulation, albeit indirectly. They felt that studying such a degree would help them to not be manipulated but as far as social media is concerned, according to them, nobody is safe from being manipulated so, in the end, it does not matter whether you study a degree or not. One student claimed that studying a degree (in whatever subject) has no influence on whether you will be manipulated or not.

As is to be expected, the most frequent words were *degree* (14), *problem, issue* and the word *manipulate* and its corresponding derived, such as *manipulation*, which occupy the third and fourth positions in figure 4. Nonetheless, there are other words, which are less frequent, but also important, such as *difficult* or *critical*.

As far as Sentiment Analysis is concerned, according to the BING lexicon, there are more negative words than positive ones in relation to the degree and manipulation topic, as table 4 shows.

TABLE 4. Distribution of negative and positive words according to the BING lexicon in how studying an English degree can avoid manipulation

Sentiment	n
Negative	4,793
Positive	2,015

Figure 4. Most frequent positive and negative words in the topic of the relationship between studying a degree and manipulation according to the BING lexicon
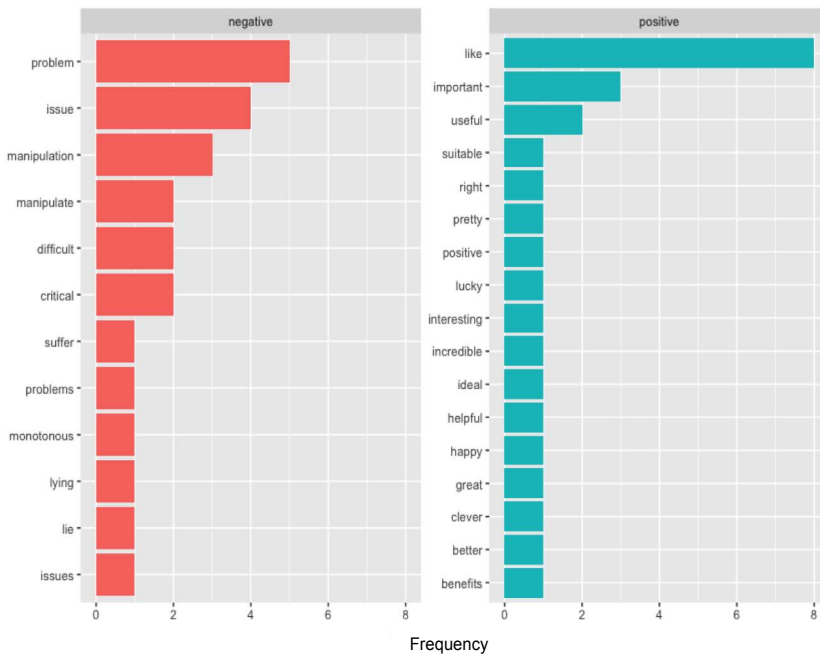
The analysis based on the NRC lexicon also shows that the prevailing feeling concerning the usefulness of studying this degree to avoid manipulation is endowed with connotations of negativity (3,332 words), followed by the emotions of fear (1,489) and anger (1,249), with words such as *manipulation* and *problem* among those most frequently used. The following emotion in terms of number of words is trust (1,240), as illustrated in table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of words according to the NRC lexicon in how studying an English degree can avoid manipulation

Sentiment	n
Negative	3,332
Positive	2,349
Fear	1,489
Anger	1,249

Sentiment	n
Trust	1,240
Sadness	1,196
Disgust	1,058
Anticipation	843
Joy	693
Surprise	534

However, great caution is needed here as some words which are classified by the lexicon as laden with a trust feeling are in fact used in a different sense in this corpus. For example (see figure 5), words such as *humanity* and *kind*, the former referring to humanities studies and the latter used as a synonym of *type*, so they cannot be interpreted as carrying the emotion of trust.

FIGURE 5. Most frequent words of each emotion in the topic of the relationship between studying a degree and manipulation topic, according to the NRC lexicon
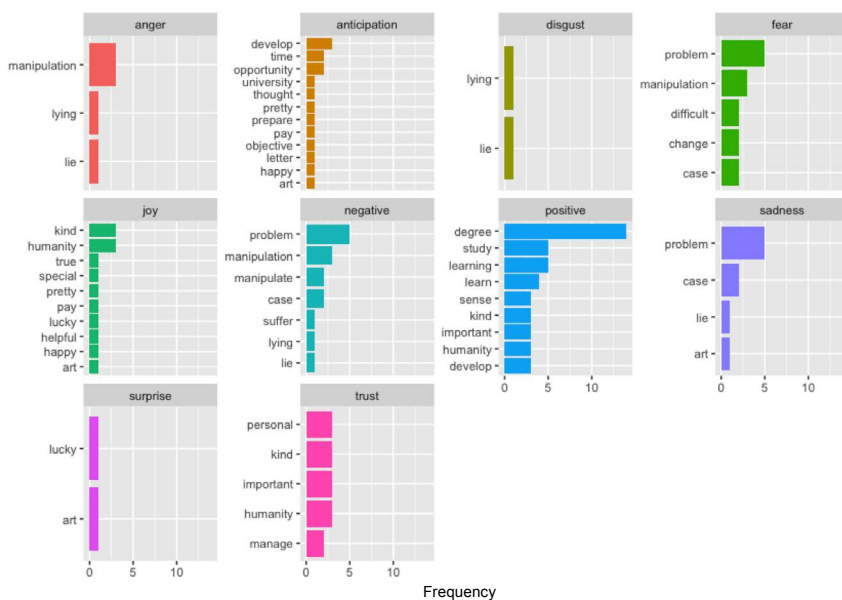
4.2. Students' perceptions of their degree course

This topic revolved around two main questions: on the one hand, what students want to do in the future and, on the other, their perception of the degree and their experience of studying it. We will comment on each aspect separately. Seventeen students were asked these questions.

Regarding the future, ten students were asked about their prospects. Six mentioned their desire to become teachers, two wanted to be writers, one a translator and one did not know what they wanted to do, but being a teacher was not an option.

With regards to their opinion about the English Studies degree they were on, responses referred to a variety of aspects. We collected twelve replies to this question. First of all, it is worth mentioning that there were two students who declared that the English Studies degree was not their first option. They had wanted to study a different degree but mainly for economic reasons, they ended up on the course. Two students reported that the degree was not what they expected. Interestingly, both mentioned the existence of literature modules as the reason for feeling disappointed, arguing that they expected "to learn a lot of English but not literature." In fact, they thought that to be an English teacher, a knowledge of literature was unnecessary. Apart from this, some students mentioned their satisfaction with the grammar modules but not with those pertaining to literature. In the words of one of them (literally transcribed): "I like this career[6], but I have a lot of subjects that I hate, for example, literature. I don't like it. But grammar I love it." In the same vein, another student claimed (literally transcribed): "[…] the negative aspects. There are many subjects that I don't really enjoy as literature." Other students also complained about the different subjects they have to choose between on the degree. For example, there was one student who claimed to hate the Arabic language[7] and not to understand why they had to study it. Likewise, another declared that studying Linguistics in Spanish[8] was not motivating because they were supposed to be studying English. Conversely, five people talked about their happiness when

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6   *Career* is considered a false friend in the Spanish language as it is very similar to the word *carrera*, that is, the one used to refer to *degree*. For this reason, students tend to mistake them for one another.

7   A second language is compulsory and they can choose from various languages, Arabic among them.

8   In the first course of the English Studies degree, students have some subjects related to the Spanish language, such as General Linguistics, Introduction to the Spanish language and Comparative Literature. The information about this degree can be seen at Universidad de Jaén.

studying languages: two alluded to studying more than one language, while three of them mentioned the English language itself. Additionally, one student expressed his satisfaction with the degree since "it provides many things," but was unable to specify.

Accordingly, the most frequent words were *degree* (28), *English* (22) and *literature* (16). Regarding the bigrams, *don't like* (8) was the one most frequently used, exclusively when students talked about their dislike of literature. In addition, as might be expected, *English studies* and *English degree* were also among the most frequent bigrams.
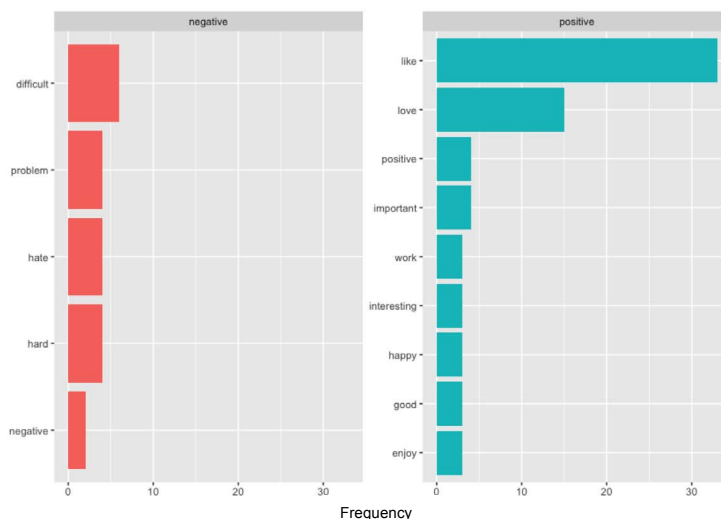
The students' responses to these questions are once again considered more negative than positive by the BING lexicon, as table 6 demonstrates.

TABLE 6. Distribution of negative and positive words according to the BING lexicon in the students' perceptions of the degree topic

Sentiment	n
Negative	4,796
Positive	2,070

Some of the most frequently used negative words were: *difficult, problem* and *hate*, this latter always referring to literature subjects, as can be seen in figure 6.

FIGURE 6. Most frequent positive and negative words used by students to describe their perception of their degree according to the BING lexicon

When analysing the texts with the NRC lexicon, we found that the prevailing sentiment is the negative one, followed again by the feeling of fear, but that responses to these questions are not associated with that of anger as for previous topics. Conversely, the feeling of trust often appears, as table 7 shows.

TABLE 7. Distribution of words according to the NRC lexicon in the students' perceptions of the degree topic

Sentiment	n
Negative	3,334
Positive	2,401
Fear	1,481
Trust	1,262
Anger	1,250
Sadness	1,198
Disgust	1,061
Anticipation	851
Joy	710
Surprise	536

As can be seen in figure 7, words such as *teacher* and *school* are classified as carrying this sentiment of trust, along with words such as *important*, *happy*, *good* and *enjoy*. However, none of these trust words were applied to literature or used in the negative form, such as "don't enjoy".

FIGURE 7. Frequency of words related to different types of sentiment regarding students'
perception of their degree according to the NRC lexicon
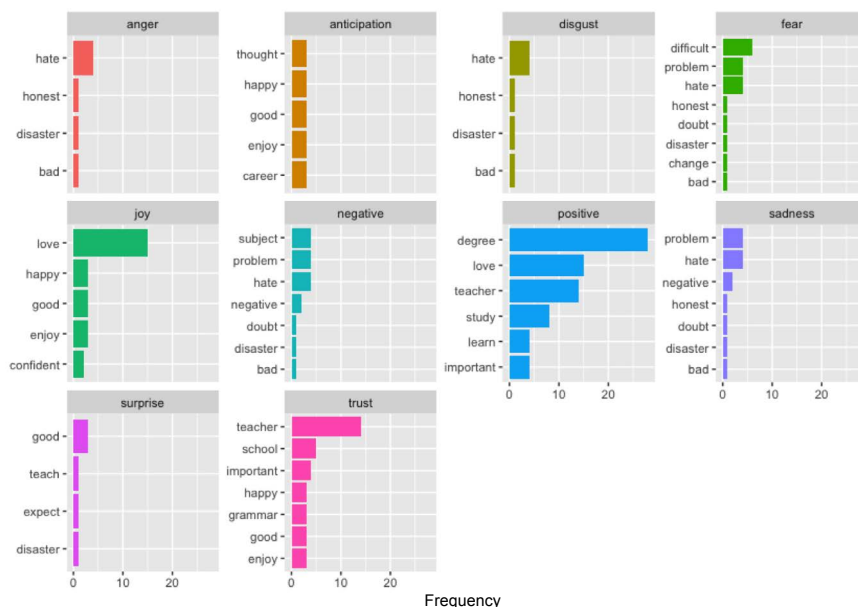
4.3. Contemporary Society

The contemporary society topic revolved around asking students whether they
felt pessimistic or optimistic about current society. They were also asked to
discuss negative and positive aspects of this society. These questions were asked
to seventeen students. Only one student felt optimistic about contemporary
society, arguing that people were aware of environmental problems and they
were taking measures to avoid them, such as planting trees. There was another
student who admitted that their feeling about society depends on the issue
involved and also declared that she felt optimistic about the environmental
issue, particularly about global warming-related problems. The remaining fifteen
students were pessimistic about contemporary society for a variety of reasons, as
can be seen in figure 8.

The two main reasons for students' pessimism about contemporary society
were: on the one hand, fake news and social media and, on the other, education.
Regarding the former, they talked about new technologies and consequently,
about social media, and the large amount of fake news that is encountered
there. With regards to education, they felt that it is not only social media that
influences society, and that education also plays an important role, although it

is not as socially valued as it should be. For example, there was one student who was very worried about the fact that society pays more attention to a footballer than to a scientist.

FIGURE 8. Reasons why students felt pessimistic about contemporary society
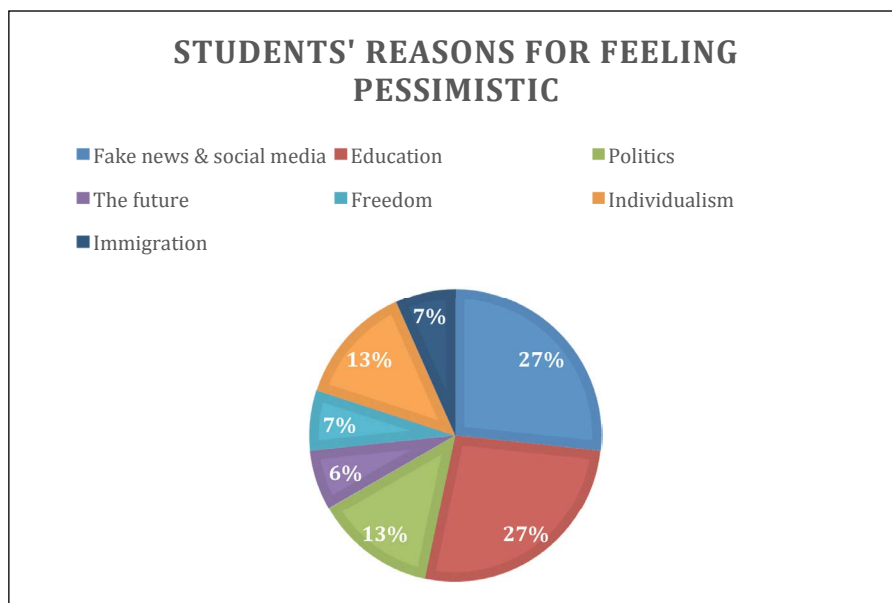
The two next most important aspects that made them feel pessimistic were politics and individualism. On the one hand, they explained that politicians tend to make many promises before they are elected but once they are in office, they do not keep them. Furthermore, they also felt that politicians lied in order to distract people from the real problems in their lives. When talking about politics, certain trending topics in Spain were mentioned, such as homophobia and the appearance of VOX[9] on the political scene. On the other, they commented on the negative aspects of human individualism, saying that people usually complain about things they do not like but do not make the effort to solve the problems. Interestingly, they mentioned the example of violence against women and how, sometimes, people know it is happening but do not report it to the police. In addition to this, one student was very worried about their future job prospects,

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9   VOX is a new political party which entered Parliament after the April elections in 2019. Since its foundation, this party has been very controversial because some of their policy proposals have been considered extremist.

another voiced the opinion that the most important problem in our society is freedom since most people feel free but they are not, while another talked about the immigration problem our country is currently facing.

The most frequent bigrams used to talk about this topic were *social media, fake news, bad things, big problem, contemporary society, gender violence* and *homosexual people*. Accordingly, this corpus has more negative words than positive ones, as shown in table 8.

TABLE 8. Distribution of negative and positive words according to the BING lexicon in the contemporary society topic

Sentiment	n
Negative	4,809
Positive	2,048

Again, the most frequent feelings were those of negativity, fear and finally, anger and trust, with the same overall number of words, as illustrated in table 9.

TABLE 9. Distribution of words according to the NRC lexicon in the contemporary society topic

Sentiment	n
Negative	3,348
Positive	2,356
Fear	1,495
Trust	1,257
Anger	1,257
Sadness	1,207
Disgust	1,066
Anticipation	854
Joy	716
Surprise	543

After analysing the results, the most striking thing is that although students were asked various questions related to their degree, there is no mention of the literary aspects of their course having any connection with their daily lives, with some even voicing the opinion that literature-based subjects are of no value in them attaining jobs, even teaching, in the future. In fact, the study provides evidence that, for some, literature is something they actually hate. It is surprising, though, that students did not make reference to any literary

aspect of the degree since 30% of the subjects offered in the second year of their course are about literature.

5. The Challenges: an Activist Literary Education and the Role of Emotions

The results of our microcosmic study evidence that the ethical dimension of the Humanities and their potential to ameliorate different aspects of contemporary society emerges as an important absence in our students' cosmovision. Likewise, as discussed in subsection 4.1, literature is a notable component of this catalogue of absences and its potential to widen students' ideological and epistemological horizons is not addressed in their commentaries. Only one of the students interviewed alluded to the usefulness of literature, in the context of fighting against manipulation. Looking at the results of Sentiment Analysis— with negativity standing out in the repertoire of the feelings expressed— manipulation emerges as a distressing reality for our students, but negativity is also clearly associated with literature in that it is clearly not perceived of as in any way beneficial or helpful in minimising the effects of contemporary problems. As demonstrated in subsection 4.2, the feelings permeating the students' opinions about literature—which, paradoxically, is one of the most frequently used words in their responses—run from disappointment to hatred. Literature is not perceived as a *locus* of enjoyment, personal enrichment or emotional self-fulfillment either. For us teachers, who conceive of literature as a source of hope and (re)generation, our primary ethical duty should be to fight against its residualisation, through meaningfully filling the aforementioned absences and working to strengthen not only our students' critical consciousness, but also their positive emotions concerning the role of the Humanities and, especially, of literature. When positive, emotions, which singularise our actions and ideological positionings, are a hugely important weapon with which to counterattack the politics of homogenisation put forward by some leading interests.

Speaking about emotions, the first challenge that we face is to consciously restore in our lessons an appealing notion of literature, such that it can eventually be perceived as a subject designed to particularly foster an intellectual and emotional dynamics that can help to destabilise the imperialist centrality of manipulative messages. As Martínez Serrano notes, students need to perceive the usefulness of literary texts in order to generate "new knowledge that might help us cope with a complex reality where events have an outstanding global dimension and planetary implications" (2015, 186). Students' perception of literature as a potential generator of refreshing new knowledge can be activated if they are shown that its essence is immune to interested mutilations and irreconcilable compartmentalisations, the reductive principles that nurture manipulation.

We must show our students that literature and its textual representations have historically configured an inclusive symbiotic realm "in which the human appears as a whole" (Talvet 2019, 44), in all its complexity, and they are, therefore, an instrument that truly enhances unbounded creativity and imagination. Working with literary texts contributes to activating a vital ability: "the ability to imagine well a variety of complex issues affecting the story of a human life as it unfolds: to think about childhood, adolescence, family relationships, illness, death, and much more in a way informed by an understanding of a wide range of human stories, not just by aggregate data" (Nussbaum 2016, 26). The students' perceptions of contemporary society outlined in subsection 4.3 were mostly negative. They identified some of its most important problems, from homophobia to violence against women. However, they did not consider literature a useful humanistic tool for activating imaginative solutions with which to fight against these distressing realities.

The humanistic ability "to imagine well" without the interference of any imposed ideas that Nussbaum describes is intimately linked to the conscious need to highlight the inexhaustible association of literature with interpretative and/or appropriative freedom. This constitutes a fruitful dimension for personalisation that will enable students to be themselves and not what mass fashions or trends want them to be, and as such they may deem it attractive and useful for destabilising the aspirations to centrality of the reductive epistemology typical of manipulation. Students need to discover the pleasures of interpretative freedom: the semiotic potential of the literary text, which knows no fossilising labels, "can by its very nature migrate across jealously patrolled borders" (Eagleton 2013, 76) and transcend limitations. As Damrosch argues, literary works "take us out of our immediate environment and concerns" (2020, 341) and allow us to intimately validate, within our microcosms, wider horizons of possibility and open spaces alternative to those infected by the pandemic of manipulation. Within the frame of an activist literary education, we must also show students that the expansive potential of literature is not just designed to be safely contained within the realm of individual improvement. It is also designed to invade the spaces of sociopolitical interventions, to ameliorate them and to protect us from some of their perversions. In a context within which, as Ruth Miller (2019) notes, "data mining, as a product of mass democracy, operates comfortably as a democratic practice, even as it calls into question the relevance of classic liberal democratic ideals" (5) and creates the illusion that "the democracy at the center of which it operates is […] a democracy that runs on endless growth" (7), one of our aims should be to deconstruct the validity of this illusion, as we have painful evidence of democratic regression. Working with literary texts trains us to discover different levels of signification, including those that displease the *status quo*. Teaching how

to effect transpositions, from critically examining the complexity of literary texts to scrutinising that of real life, is a noble task.

We need other instruments to emotionally validate in the classroom the activist potential of literature. In this respect, a second challenge should consist in fostering meaningful confluences where clear separations have traditionally been established. Reconciling our duality as lecturers and scholars entails incorporating literary criticism—a largely unexplored discipline in undergraduate environments in Spain—as a valuable oppositional tool in our lessons. At a time when reflective practices are neglected, we must encourage meaningful discussions on how the variety of the critical responses to the corpus of literary texts analysed in the classroom enriches our cosmovision and creates a wonderful endless continuum of dialogue with those texts. This dialogue perpetually revitalises them and updates their messages, whilst always being hospitably open to students' contributions.

Literary criticism can be an illuminating force in our lessons. However, this discipline is also being affected by some current pernicious dynamics. Probably under the pressures of careerism and of the requirements for publication in high-impact journals, literary critics sometimes choose to stay within their comfort zones. They practise 'safe' asepsis, thus contributing to widening the separation between academia and the human complexity beyond its walls, whilst showing a "fatal lack of critical flair and imaginative audacity" (Eagleton 2013, x). In this respect, Jüri Talvet has denounced literary criticism as being "torn away from the living reality around us and establishing its own private reign with its sophisticated language, understandable only for specialised and consecrated people, those sharing the 'language technology' of the guild" (2019, 5). Knut Brynhildsvoll argues that, on occasions, "the theory is not primarily used to shed light on the literary works, but to demonstrate its own applicability" (2017, 235). For Meretoja and Lyytikäinen "the efforts of literary studies as a discipline to acquire scientific status" have sanctioned as valid "an aspiration […] to purify literary research of any considerations of value" (2015, 1). Yet, if we confine their potential within such impermeable boundaries, literary studies "may even be damaging for literature" (Pokrivčák 2014, 168), with the result that "some of the best writing and the most profound thinking about Literature, Culture or Language might well be taking place outside academia" (Martínez Serrano 2015, 181). Asepsis and impermeability minimise the activist potential of literary criticism. In this respect, A. J. Angulo (2016a) concludes that "scholars have ignored ignorance" (3), an "*active* ignorance" that "moves beyond naïveté and passivity and into the territory of active construction, maintenance, regulation and diffusion" (6; emphasis in original) and is therefore indissolubly linked to manipulation.

Our refusal to separate literary criticism from its non-aseptic activist dimension is supported by many critical voices that advocate "an ethical turn in literary studies and in the humanities at large" (Meretoja and Lyytikäinen 2015, 1). This ethical dimension must be exploited in the classroom, by presenting students with valuable models of how through meditating on the depth of significations communicated by literary texts and on the new semiotic horizons that they open, "a leap from […] hypothetical statements of what one would do in imaginary scenarios to actually carrying out concrete actions in the real world" (Meretoja and Lyytikäinen 2015, 4) can be effected. Confluences between the specificity of what we learn and its applicability to wider areas must always be sought. Students need to move beyond the reductive vision of the usefulness of their philological knowledge as evidenced by the responses discussed in subsection 4.2. We must foster the emergence of transformationist creativity and independent critical positionings and exemplify the goodness of the non-prescriptive side of literary criticism, the one which simply unmasks human beings "try[ing] hard to unveil […] the densities of meaning embedded in a work of art," as well as "their universal worth and their irresistible appeal to innumerable potential readers" (Martínez Serrano 2015, 191). In a world deeply influenced by media manipulation, the primary function of literary criticism is to pay homage to the non-controllable boundlessness of the literary imagination: our lessons must be articulated around the attractive precondition that "the Idea of the book is the Idea that there is no end to this very Idea, and that it contains nothing less than its own proliferation, its multiplication, its dispersion" (Nancy 2009, 41). As Eagleton states, books "are inherently open-ended, capable of being transported from one context to another and of accumulating fresh significances in the process" (2013, 75), and students must see themselves as potential creators of these new meanings.

If this precondition is made emotionally functional in our lessons, it will eventually be meaningfully exported to the extra-academic space and will generate creative solutions to contemporary problems. Literature will then be perceived as extremely useful in achieving wider social aims, precisely one of the absences that the students' answers identified. Our English Studies degrees should become microcosms hospitable to healing practices, such as those training students to critically examine non-discipline-specific issues, such as "which companies make texts, physical processes of production and distribution, system of cross-subsidy and monopoly profit making, the complicity of educational canons with multinational corporations' business plans, and press coverage, inter alia" (Miller 2012, 107). Within these microcosms of resistance, we should strive to minimise the effects of the hostile factors that we described in section 2. As Nussbaum argues, "we probably cannot produce people who are firm against

every manipulation, but we can produce a social culture that is itself a powerful surrounding 'situation,' strengthening the tendencies that militate against stigmatization and domination" (2016, 44).

It is here that a third challenge must be set. We must make our students perceive that the intense confluence between literature and literary criticism is not only intellectually rewarding but also emotionally significant. We should discipline ourselves to engage with our students' feelings and emotions beyond the authority of the constraining factors integrating their sometimes hostile academic realms, made up of tight schedules and exceedingly large groups. So far, we have devoted much of our discussion to signalling the ways in which intellectual engagement can be promoted and to demonstrating that, beyond impermeability and asepsis, "*new arguments for reading literature are needed* […] that are constructively and creatively connected both to the cultural heterogeneity and to the new media ecology of our time" (Persson 2015, 202; emphasis in original). In Damrosch's words, we have put forward the notion that it is essential to make our students realise that "today the careful reading of challenging literary works has something of the oppositional force of the slow food movement in a world dominated by artery-clogging fast food" (2020, 5). Emotions must now come to the forefront. Against the distressing background of homogenising fashions and ideologies, the first meaningful emotional connection that must be established with our students revolves around setting revolutionary expectations about their (re)generative capabilities. Students must think of themselves as potential members of an 'elite' that, by reflectively working with literature, will not be an easily reducible entity. Strengthening their positive expectations about themselves is part of an "active *emotional labor*" (Hargreaves 2005a, 280; emphasis in original) that we lecturers have too frequently left aside in many universities, "where the normal mode of teaching involves large lectures with little or no active participation by students and little or no feedback on student writing" (Nussbaum 2016, 56).

Likewise, one of the most important emotional connections that can be established with our students is to tell them that they are our repositories of hope and that they must fight against the paralysing pessimism that permeates their views on contemporary society, as discussed in subsection 4.3. Within a context ruled by commodifying patterns of access to knowledge, we must privilege an educational praxis focused on strengthening their personal, inalienable *ethos* and signal the ways in which this *ethos* can be put to wonderfully transformative uses beyond academia and its sometimes exclusivist pressures to attain curricular excellence. We must encourage students to see themselves as endowed with a portable boundlessness. Beyond the excesses of specialisation and the cold authority of utilitarianism, we must guide them to use their personal meditation

on the message of literary texts to give constructive form to the multifarious components of their humanness, deprecating reductive patterns of social acceptability. We must motivate them not to neglect their non-evaluable or non-practical side because it may be the key to the (re)generation we crave, lost amidst negativity, enforced uniformity and manipulation. Our literature lessons should be, in sum, spaces where students are given the possibility of "exploring their identities and multiple positionings" and of rejecting "the processes of marginalization and the privileging of particular kinds of knowledge and experience" (Tilley and Taylor 2014, 57). We must not only trace in our lessons the history of literature and its productions, but also archaeologically exhibit the interested production and dominance of those depersonalising ideologies against which literature has always reacted.

Spaces ruled by a temporal pace suitable for promoting emotional responses to the texts—such that time working with them can be seen as a time of enjoyment and freedom—must proliferate in our 'slow-functioning' microcosms. Students must learn to value the ability to create personal positionings and interpretations. Even when these individual productions remain in the realm of the personal imagination and do not reach a stage of materialisation in concrete actions, they become inserted in a free constellation of responses to literature and, by extension, to life that enriches us as human beings and therefore contributes to validating a notion of 'usefulness' different from that represented by the practicalities rendered fashionable by the media. The supreme achievement of our emotional task would be to activate an ethics of desire, articulated around what Jeffery Frank (2019) describes as the students' "willingness to commit to conserving what is good and create conditions for flourishing" (2), in order that they can also "take the risk of demonstrating the good of that same position to a fellow student or a family member who may not, at least initially, see its good" (16). Our activist duty as lecturers and scholars is to design routes for encouraging the dissemination of these commitments beyond academia and for invading the same communicative channels that reductive ideologies use to diffuse their postulates with these new horizons of possibility. The confluence of emotions and activism generates an intellectual dynamism that is the best antidote against the contemporary pandemics that generate passivity and conformism. We cannot ignore the unhappiness we experience in these academic contexts where we frequently get lost amidst so many bureaucratic tasks and impermeable projects focused on pursuing 'excellence' to the neglect of our first duty: empowering and giving voice to the citizens who, though silenced in the media, are truly committed to ameliorating society.

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Classrooms Without Closets: LGBTIQ+ Cinema in University Education

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Abstract

From September 2017 to June 2020 the University of the Balearic Islands organised a monthly film workshop called *Aules Sense Armaris: Cinema LGBTIQ+ a la UIB* focused on giving visibility to affective and sexual diversity through film analysis in a university context. Each film was introduced with an interview with a queer activist or cultural expert related to the particular topics the film addressed, and after the screening a cinematographic and critical discussion was held in which the students contributed either with their own reflections or asking questions to the guests. This article exposes the necessity of approaching and celebrating sexual diversity from the university classroom as a form of activism. It also describes the as well as describing the criteria that were followed when choosing the films, how the monthly workshops took place and the most interesting conclusions from the post-film debates between activists, university students and spectators.

Keywords: LGBTIQA+ Cinema; Films and Education; University Film Workshop; Sexual Diversity in Films; Film Analysis

1. Motive: Why *Aules Sense Armaris*

If there was a motive that prompted the film university workshop series*Aules Sense Armaris*, it was Sedwick's reference in her article "Queer and Now" to the large number of teen suicides within the LGBTIQ+ community: "Queer teenagers are two to three times likelier to attempt suicide, and to accomplish it, than others" (1993, 1). This means that up to 30 percent of teen suicides are likely to be LGBTIQ+ individuals. It is true that the hard and striking statistics that Sedwick provided referred to 1993, almost 30 years ago, and things have changed. However, hate crimes and street attacks on queer people in countries with LGBTIQA+ legislation and which are supposedly LGBTIQ+-friendly are today extremely frequent, to say nothing of what occurs in those—still so many—other countries in which being queer directly implies the possibility of being legally tortured, and receiving long prison sentences or the death penalty. Queer people are still at risk, and in the case of queer adolescents, this risk is even higher. Being sexually non-normative and assume one's sexual non-conformity at an early age is not an easy process, as Sedwick's statistics prove. In "Queer Feelings," Ahmed also approaches this worrying reality when she asserts that living a queer life inevitably implies a brave and constant "discomfort with the script of heteronormative existence" (2004, 151). Things may have changed since 1993, yet there still seems to be a lot of work to be done.

Queer survival involves a variety of manifestations and experiences, which, even though they may differ enormously in scale, are all related to the confrontation of the heteropatriarchal and LGBTIQ+-phobic system. In the best of scenarios, queer teenagers are forced to hide their doubts and lie to themselves when they do not want to see that they are not the girl or boy that their parents/teachers/classmates/friends expected them to be; they must keep silent about their feelings out of fear of being insulted or becoming the object of bullying in their class, or because they prefer not to notice their loved ones' disappointed faces. In the worst case, queer teenagers are directly stigmatised and suffer persistent threats and violence—physical, social, legal, symbolic—which may prove lethal. They are adolescents, and they do not usually have the emotional and intellectual tools that an adult has to confront endless harassment at school and conflicting situations at home. However, two thirds of queer teenagers survive, maybe unconsciously, but definitely courageously. That is why queer teaching and writing, and incorporating LGBTIQ+ activities into school and university curricula is so important: to raise awareness and make invisible feelings, desires, and LGBTIQA+ discourses visible as early as possible. As Butler remarks in "Critically Queer," "where there is an 'I', there is first a

discourse that precedes and enables that 'I'. Thus, there is no 'I' who stands behind discourse. On the contrary, the 'I' only comes into being through being interpellated. The discursive social recognition precedes and conditions the formation of the subject" (1993, 18).

LGBTIQ+ journalist Rubén Serrano, in his Prologue "*Vidas que ya no se callan*" ("Lives That Do Not Keep Silent Anymore") to the anthology of new queer narratives *Asalto a Oz* (*Assault on Oz*), states that queer teenagers need to find their feelings and doubts, and indeed themselves, represented in queer stories, characters and books which act as referents that remind them that they are not alone (2019, 11). Trans activist Roberta Marrero in *We Can Be Heroes: Una celebración de la cultura LGTBQ+* (*A Celebration of LGTBQ+ Culture*) refers to her appetite for queer cultural references when she was a teenager as being the strongest weapon she had to find herself, her place in the world, and to fight against intolerance (2018, 9). Indeed, finding non-normative referents in high- or popular culture is crucial as a prime resource for the emotional survival of queer teenagers. As arts professor Ricard Huerta underlines in *Transeducar: Arte, Docencia y Derechos LGTB* (*Transeducating: Arts, Teaching, and LGBT Rights*), if when in class teachers or professors talk about Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Francis Bacon, Frida Kahlo, Andy Warhol, Oscar Wilde, and hide these artists' sexual orientation from their students, not only are they preventing their students' access to knowledge—since understanding these artists' work means being aware of their involvement in the historical fight for LGBTIQ+ rights and freedom—but they also become accomplices in the perpetuation of an archaic and LGBTIQ+-phobic pattern that diminishes these artists' fearless dissidence (2016, 13-14).

The inclusion of LGBTIQ+ movies in university education responds to the world's current colossal appetite for TV series and films. Indeed, it could be said that they have become one of the average public's main sources of inspiration in their search to understand the world and themselves. Some people may consider this appetite for films and TV series simple entertainment, a way of escaping life instead of exploring it. However, if a film or TV series is good, it can make people empathise with other completely different approaches to life to the point that they can modify, enhance, and improve their own. As scriptwriter Robert McKee remarks, films are not an escape from reality, but rather the opposite, "a vehicle that guides us in our comprehension of reality, our best ally to make some sense and coherence out of the anarchy of existence" (1993, 5-6).

Teaching and projecting queer cinema during both academic years 2018-19 and 2019-20, firstly in the aseembly hall of the University of the Balearic Islands, and then in Palma's Arthouse Cinema, meant providing cinematographic referents to students who might be afraid of expressing their sexual orientation or identity out of fear of being rejected just for being different. From September to

Juny, the first Friday of each month at 7pm, a film screening was held that was preceded by an interview with an LGBTIQ+ activist or expert with knowledge of the particular topic of each film, in order that students could also meet real and not only fictional referents, queer survivors who have bravely and successfully defied gender normativity. *Aules sense Armaris* became a university space of freedom, debate, and critical thinking, where students, LGBTIQ+ activists, and spectators interacted and celebrated diversity in all its forms.

2. The Selection of Films and Activist Guests: Organizing *Aules sense Armaris*

Aules sense Armaris: Cinema LGBTIQA+ a la UIB started in September 2018 as a modest project that would take place monthly during the academic year 2018-19 as part of the cultural activities organized by the Vice-chancellorship of Cultural Projection and the Cultural Activities Office of the University of the Balearic Islands. The film sessions did not take place on the main campus on the outskirts of Palma, but in the assembly hall of a university building located in the city centre in order to make it easier for people to attend on a Friday night. The film forum was advertised as a golden opportunity to watch good LGBTIQ+ cinema for free but also to emphasise the opportunity for reflection provided by post-screening discussion of the films and key aspects in the historical fight for LGBTIQ+ rights with the invited queer activists from the field of culture.

The selection of the films that were projected was not easy, as it was made following some basic but essential criteria. Firstly, the identity indicated by each and every letter and symbol in the acronym LGBTIQ+ had to be represented in at least one film during each year-long program. Secondly, the nationality of the films was important in order to avoid an exclusively Eurocentric or Western approach. *Aules sense Armaris* was guided by postcolonial concerns and tried to include films with different alternative perspectives and with directors from each continent. In this respect, the film workshop was theoretically framed within what Schoonover and Galt explain in detail in *Queer Cinema in the World*: queerness takes its place on a world stage, and non-Western LGBTIQ+ independent cinema is the perfect—sometimes the only—occasion to make non-Western queer desire visible on a global scale (2016, 1). In this way, *Aules sense Armaris* accepted the challenge of representing queerness crossculturally. Another key factor taken into account when selecting the films was that there should be significant representation of women directors in the program. According to the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, women only accounted for 4 percent of director's working on the top 100 grossing films in 2018 (Lauzen 2020, 1). *Aules sense Armaris* deliberately broke this celluloid glass ceiling, and the films directed by women that were projected and discussed in fact outnumbered

those directed by men. The films selected also had to pass the Vito Russo Test, which means that the film contains a character that is identifiably LGBTIQ+, who is not solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity, and who is involved in the plot to the extent that their removal would have a significant effect, meaning that the character has not simply added to provide colourful commentary in an act of pink washing or to reach a quota: the character must matter ("The Vito Russo Test" 2014). . And finally, another essential criterion was the cinematographic quality of the films chosen, which were required to have unquestionable aesthetic features.

   Starting with lesbian representations, the selected films were: *Carol* (2015), which narrates the hidden love story between a well-off older married woman and a young women working temporarily in a department store in 1950s America; *Rafiki* (2018), which depicts the romance between two young women in Kenya amidst family and social pressures; and *The Hours* (2002), which shows three different women in the 1920s, 1950s and 2000s, whose lives are interconnected by Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs Dalloway*. Sometimes the films included characters that cannot easily be categorized ias relating to one single letter in the acronym, fortunately. That is the case of *The Kids Are All Right* (2010), which shows a longtime lesbian marriage that falls into crisis when one of the women has an affair with a man, and which, along with lesbian identity, allowed the introduction of bisexuality and bisexual concerns into the film seriesseries. The couple in this film are also raising two teenagers, which left space to consider and celebrate same-sex parents and diverse families. Other examples of multiple letters being addressed by a film were O*Pride* (2014), which depicts how a group of lesbian and gay activists supported miners during the 1981 miners' strike in UK, and *Milk* (2008), a biopic of the US gay rights activist and politician Harvey Milk, showing how he was the first openly gay person to be elected to public office in the US with the help of his team formed by gay men and a young lesbian woman. Both films allowed the introduction of the notion of what LGBTIQA+ activism really is and how it can be carried out in order to make changes in society.

   Regarding gay representations, they were always linked to other points of focus, which differed depending on the film: through *Happy Together* (1997), a turbulent love story between two Chinese immigrants in Argentina, we provided an opportunity for the discussion of migration and homosexuality and queer love-hate relationships; with *Moonlight* (2016), which depicts the difficulties of an African American boy from a drug slam in the US to accept his sexual orientation, we explored coming out of the closet in hostile environments and racism intersecting with homosexuality; through *Before Night Falls* (2000), a biopic of Cuban poet Reinaldo Arenas who went into exile in the US, we explored and analysed the concept of "sexile", that is, going into exile because

of your sexual orientation or identity, and the difficulties it involves. Reinaldo Arenas died of AIDS, so we also addressed the topics of HIV and AIDS during the debates, as we also did with *And the Band Played On* (1993), which shows the doctors and social workers involved in dealing with the first cases of HIV and AIDS in the 1980s in the US; with *Gods and Monsters* (1998), which depicts a retired gay film director who falls in love with his young pool man, we analysed aging in the gay community; and finally, with *Call Me By Your Name* (2017), a film that portrays the love story between a teenager and a young man in the 1980s in Italy, we explored coming-of-age romances and their intricacies when they belong to the LGBTIQ+ community.

In order to explore and comment on trans men representations, we projected *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), a biopic of Brandon Teena, a young trans man from Nebraska who attempted to find himself but became the victim of a brutal hate crime; and *Tomboy* (2011), the story of 10-year-old Laure whose family moves to a new neighbourhood where Laure says that his name is Michael, and spends his summer enjoying his new male identity until the school year starts and the problems begin. Regarding trans women representations, we watched and analysed: *Transamerica* (2005), the story of a trans woman who is refused genital reassignment surgery unless she confronts her past ties and goes on a road trip with her long-lost teenage gay escort son; and *Tangerine* (2015), a dark comedy about two African American trans women in LA on Christmas Day. We addressed trans children and their families with the film *Ma Vie en Rose* (1997), which tells the story of a child who is seen by family and community as a boy, but is vocally insistent that she is a girl. Finally, we approached and gave visibility to the most unknown letter of the acronym, that is, the I of Intersexuality, through two films: *XXY* (2007), the story of a 15-year-old intersex girl who has to cope with her circumstances and define her own identity in a society that is not prepared for her individuality; and *El último verano de la boyita* (2009), which narrates how a teenage intersex boy hides his difference in rural Argentina.

The generosity and warmth of the LGBTIQ+ activists that came to the cinema seminars to discuss the films with the students and spectators and share their life experiences was overwhelming. They were responsible for creating an inspiring atmosphere in each session and for interacting so well with the public, generating critical thinking, and serving as examples of queer survivors to the audience. Tatiana Casado, who is the current President of *Benamics*, the LGBTIQ+ Association of the Balearic Islands, came with her wife and queer writer Teresa Gispert to talk about their family—they have a daughter—and the different ways of practicing activism, a topic that was also approached in depth by the former President of *Benamics*, Jan Gómez at another screening. Child psychologist Jaume Pascual and his husband, History teacher Enrique

Sánchez also talked about their two adopted sons, and what is involved in the adoption process. Introducing the students to these two examples of same-sex marriages with children was essential to the discussion of the topic of diverse families. Venezuelan illustrator Ricardo Useche described what it meant to be a gay immigrant in our country, and Saharan activist Nafi Brahim Salem shared what being non-binary is like within their religious circle. Joan Lluís Llull, who is the President of *ALAS*, the AIDS Association of the Balearic Islands, came with current Head of Internal Medicine in Son Espases Hospital, Dr. Sión Riera, to explain to us how different combating AIDS and HIV was in the 1980s from living with HIV today. Valentín Elorza and Leo Alburquerque shared their life experiences and activism as trans men, and Angela Ponce, the first trans woman to be elected to participate in the Miss Universe beauty pageant, also explained to us that for her, the best part of the fame that the pageant brought with it was allowing her to become an advocate for LGBTIQ+ rights. Africa Pastor, Founder and President of *Fundación Daniaela*, an association that gives support to trans children's families, described all the work that her organization carries out. And finally, activist Mari Carmen Díaz and her intersex daughter introduced us to the intersex community's fight, concerns and worries.

The project was a local success—it made the TV news and was reported on in local newspapers and on the radio—and also in terms of the numbers of people who attended each film seminar. This great reception led to *Aules sense Armaris* being extended to the academic year 2019-20, along with significant improvements. Due to the large number of spectators, the film sessions were relocated to a very special cinema in the city centre of Palma, that of the *Centre Cultural Sa Nostra*, where most important film forums have traditionally been held. In addition, *Aules sense Armaris* became part of the academic R&D regional project "Poetics of Activism: Cultural and Literary Intersectionalities in English Language in the Contemporary World" (GV/2019/134), which brings together scholars from the University of Alicante, the University of the Balearic Islands and the University of Santander who have similar interests in practicing activism as part of the academic courses they teach on. Another achievement was that the students that participated in *Aules Sense Armaris* 2019-20 received credit points that were equivalent to any other of their university courses, and, finally, the positive evaluation of the 2018-19 edition by the *Conselleria d'Educació*, which programs official workshops for teachers, meant that the 2019-20 edition of *Aules Sense Armaris* involved not only students but also primary, secondary and high school teachers, who received 30 hours of training for attending the workshop and participating in the debates with the LGBTIQ+ activists and the rest of the audience. These teachers' final task for the workshop was to include in their own classes a teaching unit based on the projection and discussion of an LGBTIQ+

film of their choice—but not one of those from the workshop—with their own students. The ultimate goal of both editions of *Aules Sense Armaris* was to carry out LGBTIQ+ activism from the university context, by making hidden social realities in the classroom visible. By projecting and discussing LGBTIQ+ films we have tried to drive our university students' artistic and ethic development so that they can experience their own sexual individuality and that of their classmates with respect, awareness, and joy.

3. Conclusions: Results from Interaction in *Aules Sense Armaris*

In *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault exposed his genealogical method that aimed "to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework" (1988, 117). Literary theorist Bertens also approached the construction of identities under historiographical concerns, and underlined that "literature does not simply reflect relations of power, but actively participates in the consolidation and/or construction of discourses and ideologies, just as functions as an instrument in the construction of identities, not only at the individual level–that of the subject–but also on the level of the group or even that of the national state. Literature is not simply a product of history; it also actively makes history" (2008, 140).

Similarly, LGBTIQ+ films do not simply make visible realities thate exist in the street, real life experiences that are mostly unknown by cis heteronormative people; queer cinema actively contributes to creating a more diverse society by giving voice and cultural presence to minorities who have been, and are often still, silenced and subjugated. As Marzábal and Arocena remark in *Películas para la educación* (*Films for Education*), in our current plural and open society, cinema offers itself as the ideal territory to re-build our reality. They underline that the best way of learning is by interaction, by contrasting ideas and discourses, and that cinema forums encourage this kind of debate (2016, 15). The interaction that took place among university students, LGBTIQ+ activists, teachers and spectators in *Aules sense Armaris* was extremely fruitful.

One of the lessons that all participants in *Aules Sense Armaris* realized during the two year-long workshops is that each letter in the acronym LGBTIQ+ not only has its own external fight, but also has its own internal battles. In the case of the L, being a woman and a lesbian implies a double burden to fight against within the current heteropatriarchal system. Lesbians' principal concern proved to be the constant need to combat the pervasive male gaze that sees a lesbian couple as another (doubly) female object to be consumed. As Mulvey underlines in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," the entire history of cinema has mostly been developed by guiding the spectators through this male gaze that

has promoted the objectification of women (1975, 6-18). Within the gay men's terrain, combating homonormativity, pink capitalism, and sissyphobia seemed the most necessary issues to tackle. Society still prefers manly gays, because their sexual dissidence remains invisible, and that prejudice and discrimination is also very present within the gay community itself. As flirting apps demonstrate with the omnipresent "masc x masc", a lot of gays seek a masculine guy as a partner, whether for casual sex or a relationship. As Halperin suggests in *How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality*: "Men liked other men to be rough and tough. They may have liked their women and boys to be soft and smooth, but they did not respect theses qualities in a mature man." Halperin adds/also notes notesthat there is a "hierarchical world of the sexual penetration of subordinate males by superordinate males," and denounces the still existing bottomphobia referring to how being anally penetrated has historically been "one of the most flagrant violations of the protocols of manhood" (2002, 112-22). Combatting these stereotypes and encouraging alternative masculinities that oppose the hegemonic, toxic one currently portrayed was one aim of *Aules sense Armaris*.

Concerning bisexual people, the main conclusion reached in the post-film discussion was that not only were they usually not understood outside the LGBTIQ+ community, because heteronormative people often considered them perverts, neither were they within the LGBTIQ+ community, where bisexuals were usually seen as passing through a temporary stage or not brave enough to assume their gay or lesbian orientation. As Angelides remarks in "A History of Bisexuality," bisexuality has historically functioned as the *other* to more traditional notions of sexual identity, thus undermining the binary categories of hetero- and homosexuality. Indeed, Angelides extolls the concept of "queer" arguing that queer studies have provided a new discursive space where the category of bisexuality has for the first time found a welcoming space for the articulation of its identity (2001, 199).

Regarding trans people, a frequent topic that appeared during the post-film discussionss was how trans men often have to confront cis men's discrimination against them for not being "truly men" or for being in the process of sexual reassignment. As Halberstam mentions in *Female Masculinity*, female-to-male transsexual discourses, when elaborated from queer perspectives, can purposely defy hegemonic forms of masculinity to embrace the category of transgender as a progressive one that promises dialogue and cohabitation in gender-queer worlds (1998, 13). In the film forum discussion trans women guests and spectators identified that their main fights were their complete integration into the entire spectrum of the labour market, and their battle with intolerant and narrow-minded TERFs (Trans Excluding Radical Feminists) who exclude trans women from feminist acts or demonstrations. In this respect, Stone's "Empire Strikes

Back: A Posttransexual Manifesto," which is considered the founding text of transfeminism, was very present in various film discussions, as on a number of occasions excerpts were read out and commented on: for example, Stone's argument that "we find the epistemologies of white male medical practice, the rage of radical feminist theories and the chaos of lived gendered experience meeting on the battlefield of the transsexual body" (1988, 13). Finally, the film workshop revealed that Intersex people's fights and concerns are mostly unknown, both within and without the LGBTIQ+ community. According to Morland in "What Can Queer Theory do for Intersex," the fact that the nerves in intersex people's genitalia have usually been damaged by surgery several times during their childhood and without their consent accounts for the problematic effects of intersex surgery (2009, 285). The audience of *Aules sense Armaris* agreed with intersex children's parents who spoke at the film forum that genital surgery immediately after birth should these days be forbidden until the intersex child as a teenager is capable of deciding whether to undergo surgery or not.

One last topic that gave rise to hot and interesting discussion during many of the film sessions was the concept of "queer." Some people within the LGBTIQ+ community rejected the term "queer" assuring that it was an umbrella that encompassed too many identities, and they preferred to stick to—or make use of—only their specific letter in the acronym and fight exclusively for that letter's rights. Some other LGBTIQ+ people, on the contrary, accepted the term "queer" as another non-binary option of understanding sexual orientation and gender identity, while there were also those who endorsed the letter Q as a new paradigm of thinking about sexuality because of its quintessential intersectional nature. As Hall and Jagose remark in the Introduction of *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, which they edited, queerness addresses the ways in which various categories of difference such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, and nationality inflect and transform each other. They highlight that queer learning studies and teaching approaches the formation of sexuality alongside race, citizenship and diasporic identities "in order to demonstrate the significant ways in which sexual and racial identities are inextricable" (2013, xvii-xvii). Indeed, endorsing queer anti-identitarianism facilitates the fight not only for each letter's interests, but for the entire LGBTIQ+ community's worries in a more empathic way. As a general conclusion regarding all these related concerns to each letter in the acronym LGBTIQ+, the film forum discussions proved that each letter has its own fight and claims, although there is a common battle that affects the entire LGBTIQ+ community and it is to achieve a better legislation to protect all its members.

To sum up, the most important point to come out of the two editions of *Aules Sense Armaris* is that the university context proved to be the perfect territory in which activist proposals, in this case an LGBTIQ+ film workshop, can be

carried out as a means to promote critical thinking and social change. As Huerta remarks, this is exactly what "transeducate" consists in: addressing education towards social change in defence of human rights (2016, 16).

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The Role of the Critic. A Critical Review of Evelyn Gajowski, ed. 2020. *The Arden Research Handbook of Contemporary Shakespeare Criticism*. London: Bloomsbury. 392 pp. ISBN: 978-1-3500-9322-5

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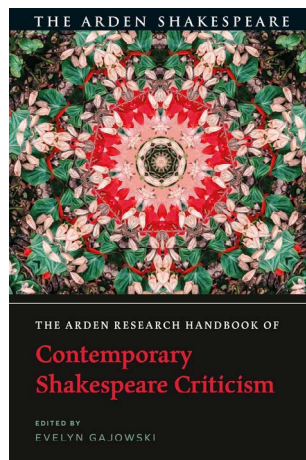Royal Holloway, University of London, United Kingdom
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What is the role of the critic today? In her introduction to *The Arden Research Handbook of Contemporary Shakespeare Criticism*, the editor Evelyn Gajowski marks that "many of the essays […] suggest the inseparability of critical practices on the one hand and social justice and political activism on the other."[1] In the current politicized climate, some might find this to be sacrilege. Objections in this line of thinking tend to be two-fold: first, the critic should not contaminate the work with their political activism; and second, the study of Shakespeare has nothing to do with modern politics and social justice. These objections present two interrelated aspects: the former focusing on the critic's subjectivity, and the latter on the object of study.

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1   All quotations from Gajowski, Evelyn, ed. 2020 *The Arden Research Handbook of Contemporary Shakespeare Criticism*. London: Bloomsbury come from a book review copy with unnumbered pages.

The aforementioned subject and object are not wholly isolated things and are indeed integrated in the role of the critic, who is positively a subject, a person doing criticism, but who already has a negative side in being a critic *of* something, empty without an object of study. Moreover, the question of what the critic should do is implicit in the idea of *The Arden Shakespeare Handbooks*, as the preface for the series states, in that they "provide both a thorough grounding … and a practical guide that equips readers to conduct their own independent research." Indeed, the tension between subjective and objective aspects animates this book, if not the practice of contemporary Shakespeare criticism.

As Christopher Marlow points out in his piece on cultural materialism, "[w]hen any critic opens a text they inevitably bring their own quirks and prejudices with them." Marlow also encapsulates the "cultural materialist mode" of writing in the motto: "to engage with the past, be informed by the present, but committed to the future." Interestingly, this motto also describes how most of the chapters in this book are structured: each type of study is given a history, situated in the present and simultaneously opening a future by giving a reading of a Shakespeare play, poem or performance. For example, Michelle M. Dowd gives an overview of genre studies from Russian formalists and Northrop Frye via Marxist and post-structuralist approaches to new formalism culminating in a novel reading of *The Winter's Tale* that solidifies the previous discussion and opens up new avenues for further study; Anthony Guy Patricia deftly surveys the rich and varied history of queer studies from Michel Foucault and Alan Bray to the resistant unhistoricism and homohistory of Madhavi Menon, while ending in "a case study of how to read *Much Ado* without being heterosexist."

In the early 80's Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian writer and Nobel laureate, asked us to consider "the critic as a socially-situated producer, and therefore as a creature of social conditioning" (1981, 133). Indeed, no critic—or person for that matter—lives in a vacuum. Kent Cartwright, in his article on close reading and New Criticism describes the situation in which close reading is done today:

> Only intrepid students practise it, guided in shabby classrooms by suspect faculty, hunted by academic administrators who would convert them to engineering majors and harangued by capitalist boosters for ruinously trading their futures as lords of Wall Street for thin-gruel lives as baristas.

Christopher Marlow, in his description on the continuing importance of cultural materialism and one of its key proponents, the late Alan Sinfield, complements the above student point of view with that of the academic:

> In a market-driven era in which university academics are enjoined by their employers to have allegiance to nothing except their own institutions, and indeed when some academics are disciplined or even dismissed for speaking publicly about the failures of those institutions, Sinfield's approach remains not only refreshing but also urgently relevant.

Therefore, in this context, it should be no surprise when Christian Smith in his piece on Marxist studies connects the dots between the role of the Marxist critic and political activism: "If one is genuinely committed to one's criticism, then the logical conclusion of Marxist Shakespeare criticism is an activist political stance." Here Smith brings together the critic's theory and practice—but it is also brought together in the figure of Marx. In an exceptional move (both within this book and introductions to Marxist criticism in general), Smith opens up Marxist Shakespeare studies through Marx's lifelong study of Shakespeare— with due acknowledgement to the seminal influence of Jenny Marx (neé von Westphalen)—and how this is endemic to Marx's theoretical work. Smith rightly points out "Marxist Shakespeare critics … do not simply read economics in Shakespeare; theirs is a political oppositional reading of the social relationships that underlie the economics." The critic is a creature reflecting on their and our social conditioning.

In making their subject-position explicit, the critic allows their audience to form their own interpretation based on the critic's presentation. This reflective practice is most clearly brought to the fore by Jessica McCall in her excellent chapter on feminist studies. McCall acknowledges the subjective position of the critic, while leaving space for the reader: "The following chapter, then, should not be understood as a prescriptive authority (this is what feminism is, this is how feminist studies is done) but as a descriptive overview." As with all of the chapters in this book, there is an inherent plurality or intersectionality at play as the reflective critic understands that no single answer or approach can resolve everything—such a singularity should rightly seem suspicious. Commenting on the homogenisation and authority of scholarly discourse, McCall states that,

> feminist studies must resist this homogenization by learning to be comfortable with the uncomfortable. It must remain unapologetically political and studied in unapologetically personal ways. To engage in feminist work is to resist doing what you're told – to engage in feminist work is to do what you can.

McCall is one of the few in this book who expressly distinguishes criticism from theory: "Criticism studies the effects of sexisms, but theory answers what sexism

is and why it exists." She continues: "We cannot answer questions about Lady Macbeth without the theory, but the theory is useless without connecting it to lived experience. The particularities of our lived experiences – our subject positions – are a big deal." It is the work of the critic that brings together theory and practice, though this only happens when the critic extends their role through their work enabling other individuals and the wider community to act. The critic should not deal in dogma as that hinders the potential power within the subject position.

These thoughts are echoed by Michael Bristol in his chapter on character studies. Bristol highlights how our own characters are enmeshed in our discussion of Shakespeare's characters. The aesthetic experience we get sometimes also engulfs ourselves in our interpretation of that experience. This is reflected in the impossibility of a critic (or anybody, for that matter) to shed their subjectivity in writing about the object of their study. Having feelings is not a drawback— yet they too need to be interpreted. Bristol writes: "character study asks for a performance; not just the one we are watching or the one we are imagining as we read but the self-reflexive one we feel and comprehend in our own response."

The work of the critic not only mediates interpretative practice but is also the result of their own reflective subjectivity. McCall again expresses this and the stakes at play clearly:

> Most feminist criticism is a combination of theoretical approaches, but all must maintain the dual awareness of a world outside the self which is always interpreted through the self. Denial of this dual awareness maintains the status quo – if personal experience isn't allowed to serve as evidence, then narratives from marginalized communities, narratives which reveal the power imbalances and injustices perpetuated through ideological, legislative and economic structures, are silenced.

This dual awareness speaks to how the subject and object inform each other. As our subjectivity is more complicated than perhaps at first thought so is the object. Therefore, criticism about Shakespeare is never just about Shakespeare.

Besides the complexity of what we mean by Shakespeare (the person, the works, the influence), the temporal distance raises other issues; for instance, what does it mean to look at the past? The eminent historian E. H. Carr wrote in the early 60's that "history consists essentially in seeing the past through the eyes of the present and in the light of its problems" (1987, 21). Here Carr is echoing the Italian philosopher and historian Benedetto Croce writing in the late 30's (*History as the story of liberty*, 2000) and a similar point is made by the German critical theorist Walter Benjamin in 1940 ("Theses on the philosophy of history," 1999). The influence of this insight can most clearly be seen in presentism. In his

exemplary chapter on presentist studies Miguel Ramalhete Gomes explains that presentism "crucially understands this critical, theoretical and political present as an inescapable and enabling factor in making meaning with Shakespeare." Presentism is another ubiquitous influence in this book alongside Marxism and feminism. Though often seen in opposition to historicism, Gomes points out that "presentism has sought instead to complement historicist work with an equally complex awareness of the importance of the critic's own context in shaping Shakespearean criticism." It should be noted that the important chapter on New Historicism in this handbook is written by Hugh Grady, one of the most influential exponents of presentism.

Even if Shakespeare is studied in the past, it is never out of touch with the present. Indeed, it should be considered whether the object of study itself is ever simply Shakespeare. In terms of history, the past has formed what is our present. Moreover, as Alexa Alice Joubin in her chapter on global studies, and Ruben Espinosa in his chapter on postcolonial studies point out, Shakespeare, due to a long history of colonisation and cultural interaction, has long since ceased to be a merely English phenomenon. Furthermore, as the chapters on ecocriticism (by Randall Martin) and ecofeminism (by Jennifer Munroe and Rebecca Laroche) make clear, the study of Shakespeare can shed light on current issues of water rights or the liminal spaces occupied by people who seek refuge. The modern critic's work, though mediated by Shakespeare, is about the world we live in. The twentieth-century German sociologist and philosopher, Max Horkheimer, differentiates between traditional and critical theory in his seminal 1937 essay, saying that critical activity "has society itself for its object" (1982, 206) and that critical theory is "dominated at every turn by a concern for reasonable conditions of life" (1982, 199).

This idea is echoed by Arthur L. Little in the chapter on critical race studies as well as by Katherine Schaap Williams in her chapter on disability studies. Williams writes: "[b]ecause critical disability studies emerges from the disability rights movement, disability studies is bound up with disability justice in the pursuit of a world that supports the flourishing of humans in their full range of diverse bodies and minds." This ethos of working towards a better world is also mirrored by the humanities play in academia, as Little states: "at its broadest disciplinary reach [critical race studies is] fighting for the soul of the humanities itself and, yes, for the progressive (or troubled) soul of Shakespeare."

It is along the multidisciplinary lines of this handbook that I have conflated these disparate voices to speak of the critic's role as if in one voice. But I do not want to put words in the mouths of others and make it seem as if every critic would have the same idea of their role in academia or society. But what this collection does do is open up possibilities of thinking differently and learning

from others. The book is structured in a roughly chronological order, each chapter is useful in not only providing a history of each form of study but also clarifies important terms and offers a good bibliography for further study. Moreover, there are helpful appendices with a glossary and annotated bibliography.

Nevertheless, I have two minor issues. First, the chapter on computational studies was a difficult read mainly due the epub format not showing any of the tables. Scholars will find a pdf or hardcopy more useful—especially with the stable page numbers for citational ease. Second, the final chapter on cognitive ethology studies seems to be written in a slightly different register than the other chapters. Although Craig Dionne's writing is very thought-provoking (a very interesting study on repetition drawing from cognitive studies and evolutionary criticism), I was still left in the dark on what cognitive ethology studies is and how is it differentiated from posthumanist studies. But this is the problem with emerging fields of study—this will be clarified in time.

In conclusion, this is an indispensable help for all critics, young and old. Personally, one of the most important insights that his collection imparts is how the subject and object are intertwined and how it impacts on the critic's work. The object cannot be purged of subjectivity (be it politics, feelings or experiences)— like all ideas of purity, it is only pure in ideology. The Frankfurt school critical theorist Theodor W. Adorno wrote in the mid-sixties "[t]he superiority of objectification in the subjects not only keeps them from becoming subjects; it equally prevents a cognition of objectivity" (1973, 171). Any proper objectivity in criticism (or any other endeavour) can only be achieved by accepting and making clear the subjective element inherent in the work.

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A Critical Review of María Elena Jaime de Pablos, ed. 2019. *Remaking the Literary Canon in English: Women Writers, 1880-1920*. Granada: Comares. 128 pp. ISBN: 978-84-9045-748-1
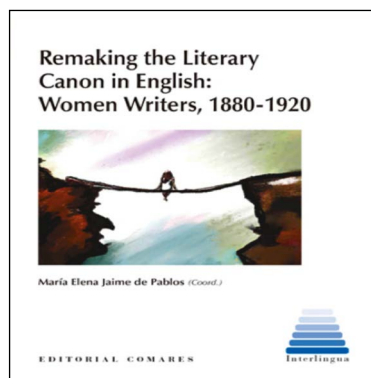
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In the midst of ever-growing debates calling for a revision of the Literary Canon in English, it is vital to question and engage with what has been traditionally tackled, and what still lies at the margins. By recovering voices from oblivion, *Remaking the Literary Canon in English: Women Writers, 1880-1920*, edited by María Elena Jaime de Pablos, attempts to reclaim *exocanonical*[1] women writers whose works span between 1880 and 1920. The end of the Victorian period and the arrival of the New Woman movement can be seen to mark a transition to a new epoch that resonates with contemporary concerns, though it was still an era in which women were economically dependent on men, and even socially punished if they "step[ed] too far outside [their] accepted gender role"

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1   *Exocanonical* is a term first coined in Spanish by Daniel Escandell (2017) to refer to those authors and works traditionally placed outside the literary canon.

(Birch 2019, 352). *Remaking the Literary Canon* aims to reassess a time both challenging and prolific for women writers, who started to instigate debates about their place in society, the concepts of femininity and masculinity, their right to be independent, their intellectual capability to produce and be in charge of their literary and artistic production, and the necessity to construct an identity for themselves free from any patriarchal and imperial ideologies. The modernity of the book, therefore, lies on its engagement with women writers, their gendered and colonial experiences, and the ways in which their writings attest to new ways of apprehending the world, resulting in literary and philosophical enquiry and experimentation that has, ironically, often been inherited and made acceptable by male writers inside the Canon.

Seeking to vindicate as well the remarkable works and lives of neglected Irish writers, together with the reasons for their fall into oblivion, the first four essays discuss women that made revolutionary examinations into science, literature, politics, religion, and female desire. The first contribution, by María Elena Jaime de Pablos, reclaims the figure of Emily Lawless, whose garden diaries held a very modern idea of combining scientific and literary thought in the search for knowledge from what can be now deemed an ecofeminist perspective. In the second article, Mary Pierse discusses how Rosamond Jacob's novel *Callaghan* (1920) touches on religion, gender, marriage, class and nationality, reflecting on notions held by its author. Pierse highlights Jacob's contribution in creating a new fictional heroine in Frances Morris that is even more transgressive than the heroines cited in L.A.M. Priestley's *The Feminine in Fiction* (1918), a work that gathered the dynamism of heroines that were modelled after the New Woman Movement. Marriage and gender are also central themes in Edith OE. Somerville and Martin Ross's *The Real Charlotte* (1894). By examining the manuscript for the first time, Julie Anne Stevens finds further clues about the inspiration the authors took from a real like woman, Mrs. Frank Leslie, and her international marriage to William Charles Kingsbury Wilde. Their fictional heroine, Charlotte Mullen, matches Leslie's "story of re-inventing herself" (33), acting on her passion and becoming a self-made business woman. Stevens most extraordinarily dwells on the power dynamics of middle-age female desire, which further connects *The Real Charlotte* with the New Woman mentality, as it asserted women's right to sexuality (Cruea 2005). In line with the involvement of Irish women writers on political issues, María Amor Barros del Río intends to make visible the voice of Julia M. Crottie and her experience with The Great Famine in "Julia M. Crottie's *Neighbours*: A Critical Portrayal of Rural Ireland and Migration." Barros del Río delves into the peculiarities of Crottie's writing, and how the author captures in her fiction an insider-outsider perspective that is complicated by being herself a

woman that defied a "gendered system where women were subject to a rigid and patriarchal scheme within the limits of the farm and the household" (46), and which was based on her own experience as a migrant.

Equally surprising is the work of Dorothy Richardson, whom Aintzane Legarreta Mentxaka recognises as the "mother of modernism" (51) in her essay "Dorothy Richardson, Mother of Modernism: From the New Woman Reform Movement to the Modernist Revolution." In her heroine Miriam Henderson, we find the first example of the *stream of consciousness* method, as well as the archetype of the *flanêuse* (57), the urban female wanderer that was left out by Walter Benjamin. Her writings, setting out a patter for modernist fiction due to its unprecedented use of punctuation, rhythm, and plot, along with its radical feminism and strangeness, might have played a decisive part on its dismissal. It seems particularly striking how Richardson has been silenced after having direct influence on James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf's novels. What is more, Richardson's recovery shows how women writers and their gendered experience were integral to the conception of Modernist fiction. As Bonnie Kime Scott maintains, those who insist that Modernism first appeared around 1910-40 are "missing and important transition, 1880-1910" in which women's entry into mass culture played a pivotal role (2007, 12-13). In a similar way, Miriam Borham Puyal highlights in "Quixotic Pioneers: Portraits of Sentient and Intellectual Women in Mary Hays' Work" how Mary Hays' heroine in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) expresses her own "radical views on education, reading, and female creativity, as well as a deep reflection on women's sexuality and how they must experience it in the midst of a repressive patriarchal society" (65). Through her writing, Hays changes "the needle for the pen" and gives voice to her sexual and existential thoughts and desires, which were traditionally reserved for men, opening the way for subsequent women writers who would inherit her portraits of radically modern women.

In "Art and Autonomy: The Female Writer in Florence Wilford's *Nigel Bartram's Ideal*," Katherine Mansfield approaches Florence Wilford's Marion Hilliard as a ground-breaking female figure in conflict with her artistic ambitions and the social expectations of middle-class women, particularly the idea of femininity that her husband imposes on her. Mansfield puts forward how "unlike her New Woman counterparts (and Wilford herself), Marion succeeds in harmonising her two identities" (83). Another issue that Mansfield remarks about Wilford's novel is the focus on Marion's body. As she puts it, "the focus on Marion's body implies that it is only through a disassociation from external social prejudices and attention paid to her authentic desires that she will be able to recognise the possibility of individual agency" (79). This idea of disassociation

and its implications in the gendered experience of women is taken to its heights by Margarita Estévez-Saá in her essay "Uses and Functions of the Trope of the Ghost in Women's Short Stories: From Mary Shelley to Elizabeth Bowen." Tracing the origins of this phenomenon, Estévez-Saá argues that it is with the popularisation of Gothic literature that women writers started to use this trope to denounce these concerns and to make use of "the disruptive and subversive potential of ghosts and ghost stories" (90). Moreover, Estévez-Saá dwells on the liminal position associated with the condition of women, and the use of ghosts as literary mechanisms to call attention to their position at the threshold and their disassociation from social and cultural impositions.

In the second to last contribution, Maria Micaela Coppola discusses Katherine Mansfield's approach to the concept of empathy in her short stories, an empathy that is more of a feeling *with* than a feeling for. This is worth being differentiated, for as Coppola argues, Mansfield's desire to be "a child of the sun" (102) expresses her intention to know herself and be all that she might be capable to become. Empathy and writing become the realm of knowledge as well as possibility—an experimentation that transforms her as an individual and frees her from the patriarchal voices that intend to limit her story as a woman. Finally, in the last essay of the collection, Jorge Diego Sánchez and Antonia Navarro Tejero illustrate how Toru Dutt and Rokeya Hossain constitute two different ways of being anti-nationalist. As they put it, Dutt's poetry offers an approach that combines her experiences in Britain and India in a way that pioneeringly "rejects a single cultural/national label, . . . opposes the imposition and the orientalist vision of the British Empire over India and . . . is able to recognise the systems of cultural and economic difference that operate in India and that appal her" (110). In that respect, it can be said that her liminal position as a migrant and colonised woman provides her with a privileged standpoint in which she is able to discern the two systems. Hossain, on the other hand, stands as a figure whose feminist defence of Muslim women lead her to challenge traditional Islamic interpretations, calling for a joint solidarity of women of all religions to overthrow British rule. As Ellen Brinks observes about Anglophone Indian women writers between 1870 and 1920, these women present a paradigm in which not only they cease to be objects of Western culture, but also arise as highly engaged and critical "wielders of discourse themselves" (2016, 5).

In the same way that Dorothy Richardson's production is educative of how the Woman Question and the gendered experience transformed fiction by making it experimental in its search for a new language, Diego Sánchez and Navarro Tejero demonstrate how literary inheritance is also a product of women writers during colonial times who held anti-imperialist perspectives. Dutt's assertion that they "like to read novels […] because novels are true, and histories are

false" (Das, 1921, as cited in Diego Sánchez and Navarro Tejero 2019, 112) resonates with the whole book. Using their writings as a beacon of knowledge and freedom, all of the discussed women writers contribute one way or another "to a renewal of language, identity and history" (113). Thus, *Remaking the Literary Canon* is concerned with calling attention to the fabricated nature of history and the Canon whilst highlighting the relevance of women writers whose *liminal vantage-point* played a crucial role in the literary developments occurring around 1880 and 1920. Each essay succeeds in illustrating how "writing about women's writing, then, is an unfinished disciplinary, sociological, and political project, as well as a literary and historical one" (Looser 2012, 221). It is in this vein that these essays set out to cover the lives and works of Irish, British and Indian writers whose contributions were shockingly overlooked, and whose diverse interests and achievements constitute a compelling and decisive learning journey for 21st century readers.

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